



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

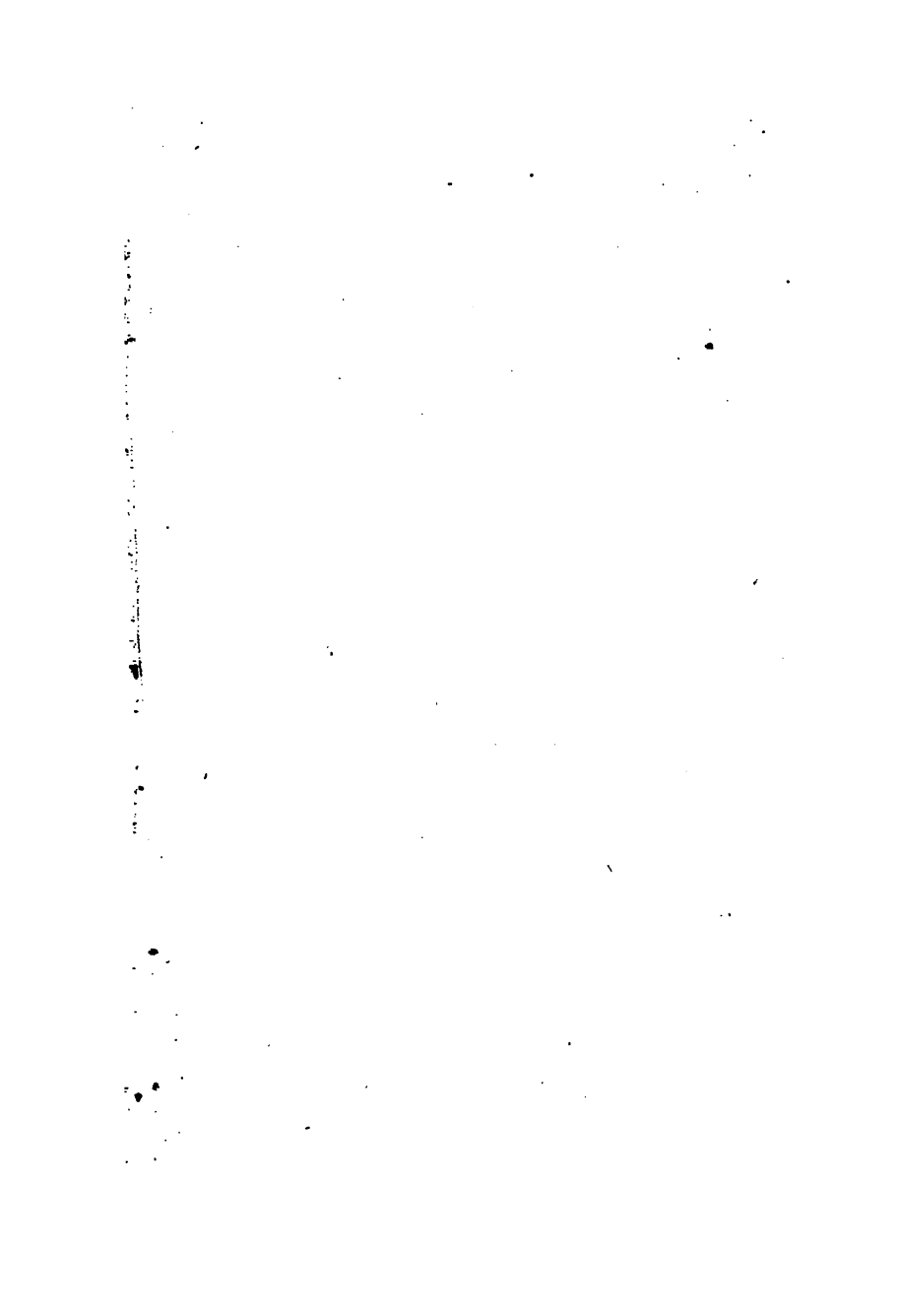


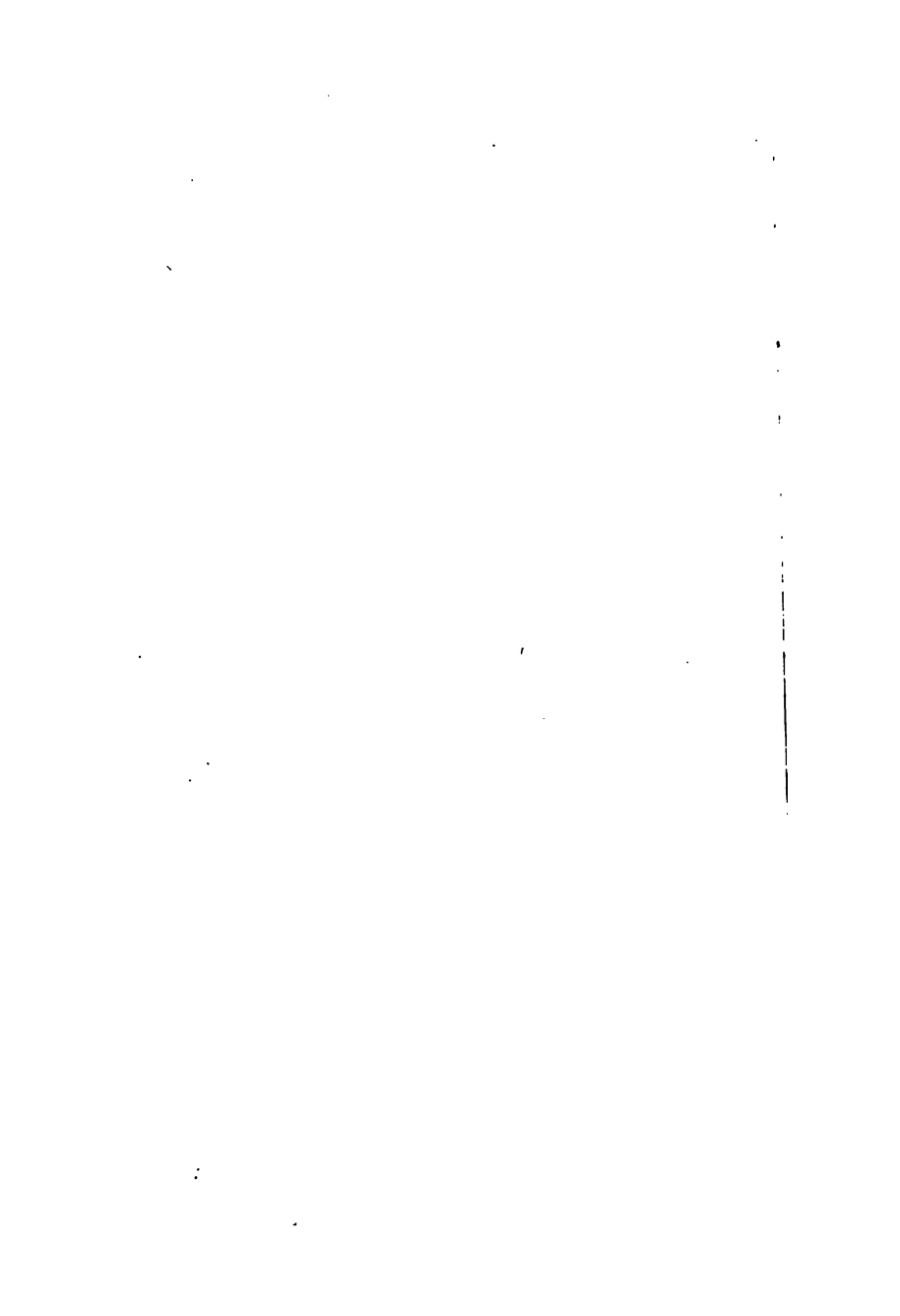


600010241E

32.

278.





AN
OUTLINE
OF THE
SMALLER BRITISH BIRDS,

INTENDED FOR THE USE OF
LADIES AND YOUNG PERSONS.

BY

ROBERT A. SLANEY, Esq. M.P.



LONDON:

PRINTED FOR

LONGMAN, REES, ORME, BROWN, GREEN, & LONGMAN,
PATERNOSTER-ROW.

1832.

278.

P R E F A C E.

THE author, having often derived pleasure from watching the habits of birds, thought that a familiar introduction to this branch of Natural History might prove useful to ladies and young persons, who were not desirous to enter on scientific descriptions, or to encounter works of greater length.

With this intention the following pages have been written, comprising extracts from several writers on the subject, together with a few original observations.

As this outline has only been sketched at intervals afforded by other employments, the author hopes it may not be criticised with severity.

1832.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

				Page
Winter Visitors	-	-	-	1

CHAP. II.

Summer Visitors - - - - 9

CHAP. III.

Resident Birds - - - - 68

CHAP. IV.

Owls.—Hawks - - - - 110

CHAP. V.

Water Birds - - - - 125

CONCLUSION	-	-	-	142
-------------------	---	---	---	------------

INTRODUCTION
TO THE
SMALLER BRITISH BIRDS.

CHAPTER I.

WINTER VISITERS.

MANY persons, either from want of the habit of observation, or from not having their attention early directed to the familiar objects around them, lose a variety of innocent pleasures which they might otherwise enjoy.* The truth of this commonplace remark is exemplified in the ignorance frequently exhibited by persons residing in the country of the birds who live, and move, and have their being round them. The feathered travellers come and go unnoticed: the southern climates send their visiters to us in the spring; the northern countries despatch their light-winged nations in the autumn. They people our groves, our fields, and the margins

* The Introduction to the amusing volume "On the Architecture of Birds."

of our rivers and lakes; and yet by many they are totally unobserved.

To the female sex who dwell in the country, so much at home, and whose walks are often confined to the shrubberies and pleasure-grounds near their dwellings, these beautiful and delicate beings offer a constant source of amusement and interest. Some persons imagine that this is a difficult subject, requiring scientific knowledge and hard names. We can assure them they are mistaken; and propose to make a few observations on some of our birds, found almost every where, hoping to excite the attention of those attached to rural pursuits. We will first speak of the smaller feathered race, that flit from hedge to hedge, and make our woods and lawns echo with their melody. Most persons are acquainted with three birds, a sparrow, a robin, and a blackbird; some, besides, know a skylark*: as to the rest, they are often confounded under the general, and rather degrading, name of small birds. From the mischievous habits of one or two little marauders, a general war of extermination is often carried on against the

* We have sometimes asked our fair young friends, if they knew as many of the smaller birds as they could count on their fingers? They usually answered confidently in the affirmative; but could seldom get much beyond one hand.

feathered race — whether hard-billed birds, who devour grain; or soft-billed birds, who destroy gnats. A very slight knowledge of their structure and habits would have saved from destruction almost all the warblers who delight us with their song.

Perhaps, if we take a short view of our common birds, beginning with the missel thrush, the largest British songster, and coming down to the golden-crested wren, it may repay our trouble.

Within these limits we shall find about seventy birds, varying in size, form, habits, structure, and note; most of which are seen, at one or other time of the year, in the fields and woods which surround our dwellings, and many of them are constantly with us.

They may be divided into hard-billed birds, feeding on grain, seeds, and fruits; and soft-billed birds, on insects and worms. Some feed on both; and many grain-eaters devour insects, though few of the soft-billed eat seeds. These are again divided into families, from some peculiarity in their formation (chiefly the beak); as the finches, buntings, warblers, &c. It is not our intention to enter into a description of their specific differences: any person who wishes to do so, with Bewick's *British Birds*, and Mon-

tagu's *Ornithological Dictionary* *, may easily become acquainted with them; and, if to these he adds that delightful little work, White's *History of Selborne*, will have store of amusement and instruction.

In considering the birds to which we have confined our view, we find they divide themselves into three sets — winter visitors, summer visitors †, and sojourners.

The smaller winter visitors, about five in number, come to our hospitable shores in autumn, and leave us in the spring. They all come from colder climates; and as the frost locks up their sources of subsistence in the north, (where, in the summer, they have built their nests and reared their young,) led by that wonderful instinct which their Maker has implanted, they direct their airy flight across the mountain and the flood.

The summer visitors, on the other hand, coming to us in the spring, and leaving us in the autumn, all come from the south; and de-

* Mr. Selby has lately published an excellent work on this subject; and Knapp's "Journal of a Naturalist" is a pleasant appendix to White's "Selborne."

† The summer and winter visitors have been called, by Mr. Selby and others, polar and equatorial migrants. At the end we insert a systematic catalogue of all those birds within our limits.

part again to the regions of the sun as winter approaches.

The winter visitors are all hard-billed birds, fitted to feed on seeds, berries, and fruits found during our winters.* They are chiefly gregarious, and seem by their numbers to band themselves together against the piercing season !

Led by the FIELDFARE, (a large and handsome thrush, whose chatter we sometimes hear so high above us that we can scarcely discern the aerial traveller,) from Sweden, Norway, and the bleak North, by thousands come together our feathered guests.

The REDWING, (scarcely to be distinguished by a careless observer from our common song thrush,) comes about the same time. These two birds are often seen in society, feeding on the same kinds of food, frequenting hawthorn trees and ivy bushes, and animating our lawns and meadows as they spread themselves over the fields in search of food. The redwing's provincial name of swine-pipe is taken from a singular note he has — a sort of inward deep-drawn sigh, like an attempt at ventriloquism.

The STARLINGS (Sterne's bird, crest, and namesake,) some of whom breed here, and many in Holland, assemble in large flocks, keeping company frequently with the rooks ; active, in-

* Except the grey wagtail.

quisitive, running here and there; distinct from all other birds in habit and appearance. Those who dwell near large waters may watch them in the evening coming from all quarters to roost upon the reeds. At first one flock, "another, and another, and another" succeed, joining the main body, who keep wheeling about in the air with great velocity (the beating of their wings may be heard a considerable distance); till at length, as the obscurity increases, they descend in parties to their chill, but safe, resting-place!*

There are not, besides those mentioned, more than three or four winter visitors among the birds we are now noticing, and they appear rather irregularly and locally. The CROSSBILL sometimes appears in considerable numbers, frequenting fir and larch trees, whose cones he opens for their seeds.†

This beautiful bird visits us, perhaps, but once in several years, and remains for a short time. We once watched three or four on a larch tree, with a pocket telescope; the sun shone brightly, and their plumage (each has some variety) glistened with beautiful tints of red,

* Some amusing remarks on the habits of the starling in the "Journal of a Naturalist," p. 200.

† Is also called the shell-apple, and accused of dividing the apple to get at the seeds.

copper-coloured, and green: hanging by the claws, sometimes with the head downwards, and sometimes drawing themselves up by the beak (with which they take hold), they well deserve one of their names, "the German parrot." The grosbeak, known by its coarse, powerful bill, sometimes visits us. The SNOW BUNTING, partially, or wholly, clad in its pure snow-white mantle, is occasionally seen in very severe winters, in the society of larks or other birds.*

This hardy inmate of the frozen north is found in the highest northern latitudes, nearer the pole than any other of the feathered tribe, and appears to be the only living being that visits the severest region of perpetual snow.†

The MOUNTAIN FINCH, an elegant species, not unfrequently in cold weather visits our fields, and appears fond of beech trees. Often found in society with one of our common sojourners, the chaffinch (named also, from its attachment to beeches, the beech finch). The mingled flock contains as many foreigners as natives: no prejudice prevents them from taking their meals

* V. White, letter 26.

† V. Franklin's Journey. Linnæus's Tour in Lapland, vol. ii. p. 282. Wilson's amusing Account of the Snow Bunting, vol. ii. p. 221. 223.; iv. 319. Within the arctic circle the grasses are numerous, and retain their seeds through the winter, and thus furnish nourishment for the birds which arrive on the melting of the snow.

together, without rivalry or dispute. The mountain finch has a beautiful plumage; the mottling of bright bay and black is singularly elegant.

An accurate and highly finished coloured print of this little visiter (often overlooked, though not uncommon,) will be found in Donovan's British Birds.



CHAP. II.

SUMMER VISITERS.

LET us turn to our summer visitors. — They come to us in the spring, as the weather becomes warmer, the earth clothed with vegetation, and the air and surface of the ground begin to teem with insect life: when the chrysalis bursts its case, the worm, and slug, and caterpillar, “and every creeping thing after his kind,” come forth; then appear, led by an unseen hand, myriads of soft-billed warblers from distant lands, formed to thin the insect race, and whose services warmly deserve our gratitude and protection.

From March till May ten thousand busy pinions ply the air, by day and night, and bring these melodious visitors from all the southern countries, where the parching heat at this season renders their food difficult to procure. As they arrive, they disperse throughout the country, —

“ They to their grassy couch, these to their nests.”

Each grove and shrubbery, each “bosky dell from side to side,” each heath and upland com-

mon, each hedge and garden, and petty rural homestead, receives some of these wandering minstrels.* It is probable they return, if undisturbed, year after year to the same haunts; and perhaps revisit with as much pleasure as ourselves the well-known scenes of their youth —

“ When nature pleased, for life itself was new,
And the heart pictured what the fancy drew.”

We may smile at the idea of fancy or feeling in a bird; yet those who have closely watched these beautiful beings, will readily believe as much difference in their dispositions as Cowper found in the temper of his hares. The “ mellow lark who at Heaven’s gate sings” must be endowed with instincts superior to those of the “ poor beetle that we tread upon.” Memory birds possess in a considerable degree.† Swallows will choose out the same nook for their

* “ It has always appeared to me,” says an eminent writer and accurate observer, “ that the two great sources of change of place of animals was the providing of food for themselves, and resting-places and food for their young. Swallows and bee-eaters decidedly pursue flies over half a continent. And a journey from England to Africa is no more for an animal that can fly with the wind one hundred miles an hour, than a journey for a Londoner to his seat in some distant province.” — *Salmonia*.

† M. Buffon mentions a bullfinch which had had its cage upset by a rabble of low people, and used to fall into fits when *ill-dressed* persons approached it.

nest year after year. That elegant little bird, the common fly-catcher, is attached to the same spot. A pair built for three summers successively in the same place, close to the writer's study window; and their chase for gnats and other insects was under his view, as he sat reading: and for a considerable period the parent birds, "from early dawn till latest eve," might be observed catching assiduously our English muskitoes.

It is not likely, in the vast solitudes and extensive forests of Africa (whither many, probably, retire in winter), that our summer visitors are much pursued or frightened by men. This habit which they possess, of returning to the same haunts year after year, might therefore be turned to account by partially taming them; at least their fear of the human shape might be greatly lessened if the annual guest of the same shrubbery was undisturbed and protected: his progeny (in due succession likewise our guests) would lose their dread of man. Birds in confinement evidently know the figure and voice of those who are kind to them*; and wild birds know their enemies, if not their friends, and

* An interesting account of several summer visitants in Sweet's "British Warblers," where accurate directions for preserving them in health through the winter are given.

will gradually become comparatively familiar with those who do not hurt them.

Would it be an unbecoming or ungrateful task for the gentler sex to extend their kind offices even to these innocent and delicate beings, and to prevent, as far as their influence extends, the nests of the summer birds from being taken? These aerial travellers do no hurt to any one, they do much good to many; they amply pay our slight protection by their melody; and if we rob their nests, we can seldom feed or rear their young.

We venture, moreover, to recommend to our female friends the observation (we had almost said the acquaintance) of those whom their goodness has preserved: lessons of maternal love may be learned even from the birds. If industry is admirable in the bee, so is it in the little wren*; and we persuade ourselves, when their protectress walks forth in the fresh morning, and is saluted by a hundred tuneful voices of joy and gladness, that melody will be still sweeter as it springs from happiness to which she has contributed.

* "A golden-crested wren," says Mr. Montagu, "fed her young thirty-six times an hour; and this continued for sixteen hours a day. I could always perceive by the animation of the young brood when the old one was coming—probably some low note indicated her near approach; and in an instant every mouth was open."

About twenty song birds of passage come to us, and rear their young in our island. Of these some are local species, and some but partially and thinly scattered.

These guests of summer remain to enjoy our finest weather, when the warmth of the climate, and the richness of vegetation, and the harmony of nature, invite us abroad. We think that our fair readers might double the pleasure of their walks if they knew each note of their tiny visitants, and distinguished the form and plumage of every feathered songster.

They may perchance, in the lives of these fragile beings, see an epitome of their own destiny ! Gaily and gladly they enter on new scenes in spring : the buds and the blossoms surround them ; the sounds of joy and happiness are on every side ; and the voice of flattery and fondness is sweeter than all ! Yet a little while, and they are matrons, bending in solicitude over their infant progeny ; full of anxiety and care for lives dearer than their own ! A few summer days elapse, and the yellow leaves of autumn begin to wither on the boughs, and the winds sigh mournfully around them, and the nearest and dearest ties are broken ; and, as the cloudy shroud of winter approaches, they take their long journey to distant worlds, beyond this dim horizon !

One of the prettiest and most common summer visitants is the **WILLOW** or **YELLOW WREN**; an elegant little bird, of a greenish yellow hue, light in form, and active in disposition. The willow wren is often seen among the boughs of the tree whence he takes his name, hunting for insects amid the leaves, or hopping about the pea-rods in the garden, or flitting round the currant bushes: "it has a soft pleasant strain, with considerable pauses between." Being a rather tame species, we recommend it to the observation of beginners.

It arrives with us about the middle of April, and feeds on insects. Mr. Sweet says, he had one so tame as to take flies in a room, and from the hand of its master; and to drink milk from a tea-spoon held towards it! Montagu says the nest is of an oval shape, with a small opening near the top.

The next is the **MIDDLE WILLOW WREN**, or **CHIFF-CHAFF**, so named from its note, like chiff-chaff, or chit-chat, and sometimes (when the little bird is apparently eager or angry) becomes quicker, and doubles into chiffy-chaffy.

This is a very early bird, and is heard frequently before the trees are in leaf. Its colour is on the back greenish brown, a yellowish streak above and below the eye. These little birds are very active, flying after each other,

and catching flies or gnats: they take the larva of insects from curled leaves and buds. "One that was caught, soon drank milk from a spoon in the hand, often following the person who held it; and, flying to the ceiling, would bring down a fly each time." *

The next we have seldom met with: it is found and heard in high hollow woods, amid tall trees, and called the WOOD WREN; is distinguished by a yellow throat and cheeks, and a yellow line through the eye. It arrives in April, and leaves us the end of August; and has been called the "shaking bird of the wood," from its shaking note. Montagu states, "It is partial to oak and beech woods, where it may be found by its singular note, which seems to express the word 'twee,' drawn out to some length, and repeated five or six times successively; terminating with the same notes, delivered in a hurried manner, at which time it shakes its wings." †

There are three of our visitants in summer, all rather local species, and all delighting us with their songs, in which they are superior to the rest of their tribe: 1. the NIGHTINGALE, so celebrated in all countries, whose sober plumage of tawny brown would never attract our atten-

* Sweets' Warblers.

† Montagu's Ornithological Dictionary.



NIGHTINGALE.

tion, though his light and elegant form might excite admiration. This delightful songster is not found north of Shrewsbury in the west, or Doncaster in the east; and is seldom seen in Devonshire or Cornwall. "It has been observed, that it is not seen but where cowslips grow plentifully," — indicating a damp cool soil, and probably yielding those insects it delights in. All writers praise the song of this bird. We will only quote the eloquent expressions of an American naturalist, called forth by a songster of the new world: — "When every object around conveys the sensation of joy, and Heaven's abundance is, as it were, showering around us, the grateful heart beats in unison with the varying elevated strains of this bird. We listen to its notes in a kind of ecstasy, as a hymn to the great and most adorable Creator of all. Abject must that heart be, and callous those

feelings, and depraved that taste, which neither the charms of nature, nor the melody of innocence, nor the voice of gratitude or devotion, can reach." *

The GREATER PETTYCHAPS is not very common, and second only to the nightingale as a songster; of light olive brown on the back, and distinguished by a whitish streak from the bill, over the eyes. "Its notes," says Mr. Montagu, "are sweetly and softly drawn; others quick, lively, loud, and piercing, reaching the distant ear with pleasing harmony, something like the whistle of the blackbird, but in more hurried cadence."† Mr. White says it is rare in Hampshire, and describes its movements with his characteristic amusing accuracy:—"It is active and restless, like the willow wrens, and hops from bough to bough, examining every part for food: it also runs up the stems of the crown imperials, and, putting its head into the bells of those flowers, sips the liquor which stands in the nectarium of each petal."‡

The BLACKCAP, or MOCK NIGHTINGALE, is another elegant summer visiter; the coat on his back is of a plain greyish tint; the top of the head black, and in the hen brown. "This bird delights us with its melodious song, which

* Wilson.

† Ornithological Dictionary.

‡ History of Selborne.

is very little inferior to that of the nightingale, except in variety of notes. On the first arrival of this bird, it feeds greedily on ivy berries; but forsakes that food as soon as the vernal sun has roused the insect tribe." *

Mr. Selby says it is fond of raspberries and red currants. This little bird may easily be known from all others by his quaker grey dress, and his quaker-like habit *of always wearing his hat on!* "The blackcap," says Mr. White†, "has in common a full, sweet, deep, and loud pipe; yet that strain is of short continuance, and his motions are desultory: but when the bird sits calmly, and engages in song in earnest, he pours forth very sweet, but inward melody, and expresses great variety of soft and gentle modulations. Blackcaps mostly haunt orchards and gardens; while they warble their throats are wonderfully distended."

Mr. Sweet says, "It is a real mock bird, and will catch the note of any bird that it happens to hear sing. I have heard it," says he, "imitate the nightingale so exactly, that it has deceived me; also the blackbird, thrush, and the greater pettychaps, all of which it imitates so much in its voice that it is almost impossible to detect it, — except when it runs from one into

* Montagu.

† Selborne.

the other, or shows itself on the open part of a tree." *

The three last are, perhaps, the most distinguished songsters among our summer visitants : there are yet about fifteen others, and all and each well worth the attention of those who feel an interest in these beautiful and elegant strangers. As several are, however, of comparatively rare occurrence, or confined to particular places, we will but give a cursory glance at them. One or two will merit a more particular attention.

Our readers (if they ever mark "the wild-bird's note") must have listened to one little songster, who often carols forth his sweet and swelling song at a time when almost all others are silent — in the mid-day heat of sultry summer. The cattle, reposing in the shade, chew the cud, — the tuneful minstrels of the morning and the evening have forgotten their lay, — and all nature seems silent and at rest ; — then the little grey-coated WHITETHROAT pours forth, at intervals, from the hedges around our gardens and dwellings, his song ; † sometimes cheerful, hurried, and swelling into apparent exertion, and

* British Warblers.

† The whitethroats, on some sunny day in April, are often heard in almost every plantation or coppice, though none were to be seen the day before ; their note is a sign many other songsters are arrived.

then softening into a plaintive close. The monotonous yellow bunting alone responds to him: sitting on the top of some thorn by the road-side or dusty hedge, covered with the traveller's joy, he repeats his well-known three melancholy notes.*

It is singular how some well-known sound, — even the song of this little bird, — associated with remembrances of other scenes and times, will awaken long trains of thought in the minds of men. We remember, a few years since, under circumstances of some depression, alone in a sultry day, (when walking between the Hague and the village of Scheveling, on the bleak shores of Holland,) hearing unexpectedly the song of this warbler of home; and the note brought back in a moment, clear as a mirror to the mind's eye, cherished scenes across the waters, and the forms and voices of those who gave them value. And once at Rome, amid the magnificent but melancholy ruins of the Colosseum, at noon, when no cloud shadowed the deep blue sky, when all other voices were silent, from the shrubs of that vast amphitheatre this English warbler suddenly poured forth his song, awakening a thousand recollections of the land

* The cow-boys, according to Mr. Main, have, from their own feelings, composed words to his short song: —

“A lit - tle bit of bread, but no cheese.”

Mag. of Nat. Hist.

of the free, and calling forth in strong contrast her noble institutions, and energetic people, and continual improvements, with the degraded creeping slaves of bigotry and despotism, sinking each day lower and lower in the scale of existence, as the malaria and the moral pest of ignorance encompass closer their decayed and devoted city.

“The whitethroat,” says Mr. Selby, “possesses a pleasing, but cursory song, frequently uttered upon the wing, as it rises from the spray upon which it has been perched to a considerable height in the air, and descends slowly to the same spot from whence it had taken its departure.”* This little warbler is one of the most common of our summer visitants, found in the thickets and hedges, and is frequent in gardens among the fruit bushes. It has the provincial name of nettle-creeper, from its often being seen among nettles, brambles, and other coarse herbage; where, creeping amid the stems, it gathers its insect food, “and is also called by rustic observers, peggy, wheetie why bird, muff, Charlie muftie, haytit, &c.”† The nest is very slight, of goosegrass or cleavers, and placed in some low bush.‡

* Selby's British Birds. † Architecture of Birds.

‡ An interesting description of the nest is given in Mr. Rennie's work on the Architecture of Birds.

Mr. Sweet discovered a mode of preserving this and other soft-billed warblers in good health and song through the winter. His account will be read with great pleasure by any one fond of birds. He says (in speaking of the whitethroat): "One that I at present possess will sing for hours together against a nightingale, now, in the beginning of January, and it will not suffer itself to be outdone: when the nightingale raises its voice, it also does the same, and tries its uttermost to get above it. Sometimes in the midst of its song it will run up to the nightingale, and stretch out its neck as if in defiance, and whistle as loud as it can, staring it in the face. If the nightingale attempts to peck it, away it is in an instant, flying round the aviary, and singing all the time."*

Mr. Bewick remarks, what we have frequently observed, that it is often heard, in the midst of a thick covert, to utter a pretty constant grating sound (somewhat like scolding, in our opinion,) of cha, cha, cha; which it leaves off as soon as it is disturbed."

In the United States there is a little bird, called the Maryland yellow-throat, whose habits resemble our whitethroat. "It might with propriety be denominated Humility (says Wil-

* British Warblers.

son); its business or ambition seldom leading it higher than the tops of the underwood. Insects and their larva are its usual food. It dives into the deepest of the thicket, rambles among the roots, searches round the stems, examines both sides of the leaf, raising itself on its legs so as to peep into every crevice; amusing itself at times with a very simple, and not disagreeable, song or twitter, — whitititee, whitititee, whitititee; pausing for half a minute or so, and then repeating its notes as before." *

There is another species, called the LESSER WHITETHROAT, found in the southern counties, differing little from the preceding, and inferior in song. Sweet says, "It will soon become tame and familiar; and will readily take to feed on bread and milk, and also on bruised hemp-seed and bread." Bewick says, "It is of a shy and solitary disposition, and not often seen; darting like a mouse through the interior branches of the brakes and underwoods, among which it shelters itself."

There is one handsome visiter often seen about our shrubberies, whose splendid plumage of grey, red, and black must attract every observer. It is the REDSTART, sometimes called red-tail, or brantail. We have often watched it with

* Wilson's American Ornithology.

much interest: by its gaudy apparel, it is distinguished from most of the other warblers, and has some habits peculiar to itself. "During its residence with us, it will generally be found in the vicinity of old walls, in the crevices of which, as well as in the holes of decayed trees, it prepares its nest. This is formed of moss, with a lining of hair and feathers, and contains from five to eight eggs, of a fine greenish blue, lighter in shade than those of the hedge accenter (our resident). It is an active and restless bird; and, when perched, shakes its tail with a rapid and singularly tremulous motion. From its song, (which, though short, is of sweet and pleasant notes,) together with its light elegant shape and varied plumage, it may be considered one of the most interesting of our summer visitants." *

If we visit, in the summer season, any of those old castles or monastic ruins which give so much additional interest to many parts of our country, whilst the daws respond to each other with their appropriate melancholy call, as we walk round the ruined walls and fallen fragments, this elegant bird will often flit before us; and, standing on a broken battlement or moss-grown pillar, shake his bright plumage, as if in triumph over the works of man!

* Selby.

It is said, "that when it first arrives in spring, it mounts to the top of the loftiest trees, where it will sit and sing for hours, beginning at day-break." This species is singularly attached to its nest: we remember one, which had made its nesting-place in a garden wall, being discovered by a young lady, who used to visit it daily, and who dexterously caught the old bird, when sitting, and carried it, with great tenderness, into the house, to show her sister; and then replaced it on the nest. Notwithstanding this, and that the eggs and young ones were afterwards frequently handled, the redstart reared her progeny safely; and the young lady, who may think she had some hand in the matter, looks for the arrival of her friends every summer.* Mr. Sweet says that, "in confinement, the redstart will sing by night as well as by day, if a light be kept in the room where it is: it will soon get very tame, and be much attached to the person that feeds it: if brought up from the nest, it may be taught to sing any tune that is whistled to it. One that I was in possession of," continues he, "learned to sing the Copenhagen waltz, only it would sometimes stop in the middle of it and say, 'Chippit,' — a name by which it was generally called, and

* We do not recommend this practice to our young friends.

which it would always repeat every time I entered the room where it was, either by night or day."

It may be, that, in our summer walks, leaving the shrubbery and the groves, we sometimes visit the margins of rivers and brooks, where, refreshed in the heat by moist exhalations, the foliage is greenest, and the wild plants most luxuriant; frequently, amid the damp under-wood or swampy places overgrown with briars, we shall hear a long-continued monotonous birring note, like that of a field cricket, "the note consists of a sort of sibilant ringing cry, repeated for many minutes without intermission." This proceeds from the GRASSHOPPER WARBLER, "a remarkably shy and timid species; it is seldom seen on the wing, but remains shrouded in the middle of the thickest furze or other entanglements, which it threads with the rapidity of a mouse." Mr. Montagu thinks the sound may serve as a decoy note to the mole cricket, and also as an invitation to the bird's mate.*

However that be, our little songster is a sort of ventriloquist, as it can cause the sound, at one moment, to proceed from the immediate neighbourhood of the listener, and, at the next, as if removed "to some distance; and this,

* "This note begins in the dusk of the evening, and the grasshoppers chirp with the setting sun." — *Montagu*.

without any actual change of place in the operator." * An observer remarks, "they occasionally drop to a third below the key, but soon resume it again." † The general plumage is of an oil green well suited to concealment amid the underwood. The tail is wedge-shaped. It is sometimes found in thick hedges and on damp commons; its nest is concealed in a most artful manner. "Nothing can be more amusing," says Mr. White, "than the whisper of this little bird, which seems to be close by, though at a hundred yards' distance; and, when close at your ear, is scarce any louder than when a great way off. The country people laugh when you tell them it is the note of a bird." ‡

If we pursue our walk to some sweep of the river "with verdant alders crowned," or to the sedgy meer or reedy pool, we shall hear the little REED WREN or WARBLER, who has a quick irregular strain of notes. "It is found near wet ditches and fens, the margins of rivers and pools overgrown by reeds and tall aquatic plants; and is most frequent in the counties south of Nottinghamshire." § Montagu says, "it may be distinguished from its neighbour the sedge warbler (found, but more commonly, in similar situations), by the base of the bill

* Selby.

† Mag. Nat. Hist., vol. v. p. 18.

‡ White's Selborne.

§ Selby.

being broader, having no light stroke over the eye, and in the whole upper parts being of one plain colour. The nest being deep gives security to the eggs, which would otherwise be thrown out by the wind. We have seen," continues that excellent observer, "the bird sitting on her nest when the wind blew hard, and at each gust forced it almost to the surface of the water."

By the side of every stream, amid the sedges and the willows, there is to be found another elegant summer visiter, of superior song, called the *SEDGE WARBLER*; the upper parts are yellowish brown, and it has over the eye a whitish stroke. This bird makes its nest in a tuft of rushes, in a low bush, or on the stump of a willow. Its pleasing song has often been given erroneously to the red bunting or black bonnet, found about the same places, and generally conspicuous on the upper branches whilst the true minstrel is concealed below.

We have often listened to this bird with great pleasure. In the still evening, and even in the night, from its cool retreat it pours forth its interrupted though unwearied song. "This consists of a great variety of notes, amongst which may be observed close imitations of the swallow, lark, sparrow, and linnet, mingled with other and more guttural notes; and the whole deli-

vered with great rapidity."* In general, it remains concealed from view in the closest reeds and bushes; but will sometimes sing perched on the very top of a small branch; or warble in its flight (which, on such occasions, is very peculiar), from one station to another, at short distances.

A different author says: — "This is a songster of wonderful powers; he may be called the Italian as to style, for the whole excellence consists in the variety and extremely ridiculous rapidity of his execution. It is impossible to give any thing like an intelligible description of his long-continued extravaganza: spirited, changeful, precipitously running over every note and half note within the compass of his pipe, quicker than even attention can follow."†

The early morning notes of birds have been well described by a late writer: one of the first is the restless inquisitive robin: — "This is the last bird that retires in the evening, being frequently flitting about when the owl and the bat are visible; and awakes so soon in the morning, that little rest seems required by it. The worm is its food, and few that move upon the surface escape its notice. The cheerful melody of the wren is the next we hear, as it bustles

* Selby.

† Magazine of Natural History, No. xviii.

from its ivied roost ; and we note its gratulation to the young-eyed day when twilight almost hides the little minstrel from our sight. The sparrow roosts in holes, where the light does not so soon enter, and is rather a tardy mover. It retires early to rest. The blackbird quits its leafy roof in the ivied ash, and, with mellow sober voice, gratulates the coming day. The plain-song cuckoo grey from some tall tree now tells its tale; the lark is in the air ; the martin twitters from her earth-built shed ; all the choristers are tuning in the grove, and, amid such tokens of awakening pleasure, it becomes difficult to note priority of voice. When blessed with health, having peace, innocence, and content as inmates of the mind, perhaps the most enjoyable hours of life may be found in an early summer morning." *

From the watery margins and low valleys let us turn to dry upland commons and barren heaths : even there we shall find visitants of summer peculiar to the scenes they inhabit, and each sending forth its voice of gladness to animate the waste.

In crossing extensive downs or stony tracts near the coast, the WHEATEAR, or WHITE RUMP, will often flit before us : its grey and white plumage easily distinguishes it. It is much

* Knapp's Journal of a Naturalist.

esteemed for the table; and many thousands are annually taken in snares, every autumn, on the downs of Sussex. Two clods are placed edgewise, leaving a small opening between them, and at each end of the passage a snare is fixed: the wheatear, seeking shelter or shade, is thus decoyed to his destruction. This bird is found thinly scattered through many parts of England, and is not unfrequent on rocky wastes in Wales. Mr. White remarks, that even in Sussex, where so many are taken, they are never gregarious, but only seen two or three at a time; and thinks they do not all leave this country in winter, as he saw a few stragglers in many counties at all times of the year.

The WHIN or FURZE CHAT is found on every extensive common in the summer. "He is an alarmist, flitting from bush to bush before the passenger; uttering a quick *chee, chuck, chucking* cry, accompanied by a quick jerk of the wings and tail." * It is to be remarked, that it almost always alights on the topmost spray of the bush on which it rests, probably the better to look around it; and will sometimes diverge a little after some insect, and again resume its watch.

The STONECHAT, or STONE-CHATTERER, is another little bird, nearly allied in habits to the last,

* Magazine of Natural History.

but not so elegant in plumage ; it is chiefly found in stony wastes, is called sometimes the stone-smith, and his alarm-note sounds like one pebble smartly struck against another. This visitant has the habit of alighting in his short flights on the topmost stone of the wall or heap, as the whinchat does on the upper sprig of his thorn or furze bush.

The DARTFORD WARBLER is another visitant of furze commons in the southern counties, and has a pleasing song ; being, however, a local and rare species, we will only refer to Montagu or Selby for its habits. In Provence it is said to be common, and to roost within the fold of the leaves of the large field cabbage (a comfortable shelter) to secure itself (says Buffon) from the bat. This imputation on the poor bat is, however, probably quite groundless.

Mr. White gives the following table of the commencement of song in different birds in Hampshire : —

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| 1. Missel Bird | - January and February. |
| 2. Song Thrush | - February and to August. |
| 3. Blackbird | - Feb. and Mar. to Whitsuntide. |
| 4. Woodlark | - January, and through summer and autumn. |
| 5. Robin | - All the year. |
| 6. Wren | - All the year. |
| 7. Skylark | - Early in February. |
| 8. Hedge-sparrow | - Early in February to July 10. |
| 9. Yellowhammer | - Early in February to August 21. |

- 10. Swallow - April to September.
- 11. Blackcap - April to July 13.
- 12. Titlark - Middle of April to July 16.
- 13. Whitethroat. - April to July 23.
- 14. Goldfinch - April to September 16.
- 15. Greenfinch - April to July and August.
- 16. Less Reed Spar- - May to July.
row (Sedge-
bird)
- 17. Linnet - Till August, and again in October,
and again when the flock separate.
- 18. Willow Wren - April to June 15.
- 19. Redstart - May to June 15.
- 20. Chaffinch - February to June.
- 21. Nightingale - April to June 15.
- 22. Grasshopper Lark April 15. to August.
- 23. Wood Wren - May to August

There are yet two summer visitants to our shrubberies and groves unnoticed, viz. the grey and pied flycatcher. They have little bristles or hairs at the base of the bill, and are con-



PIED FLYCATCHER.

stantly busy in our service, if their song is of no great value. The **PIED**, or **BLACK and WHITE**.

FLYCATCHER, we cannot mistake, if we see him but the bird is rather rare, and is not found in all places. One author says: "Its manners somewhat resemble those of the other flycatchers, by snapping flies, and returning again and again to the same stand. They look like a magpie in miniature, with a white spot, as it were the last snowdrop, very conspicuous on the forehead."*

THE GREY FLYCATCHER is a common and very amusing species. Being of a tame disposition, we may easily watch all his movements: perched (in warm weather) on a rail or post, every minute or two he leaves his resting-place in pursuit of some vagrant gnat, follows it in a zig-zag flight, like a butterfly, or, flying upwards two or three feet to take his prey, descends again to wait for more; returning repeatedly to the same station, where he stands sentinel against our insect tormentors.

Of what inestimable value would some birds of this or similar species be, if domesticated in the dwellings of those who live in Italy or the West Indies, or countries teeming with gnats, midges, and mosquitoes. As Mr. Sweet and others have succeeded in preserving, for years, soft-billed and insect-eating birds, in aviaries, through our winters, we do not see it would be difficult, in more genial climates, to cherish these feathered assistants. The stork, and vulture,

* Magazine of Natural History, No. xxiii.

and the fish hawk are preserved as useful to mankind in different countries. The two former are almost tame; why might not our attention and protection win to our aid, in like manner, these beautiful and diminutive allies, whose efforts in such a war would be more effective than if a race of giants rose up to help us?

The wild falcon and the hawk have been reclaimed so as to leave our hand at a signal, dash through the heavens after their quarry, and return to us again; and why may not a gentler race of birds be also partially tamed? Then, instead of a person of rank coming forth, bearing a hawk (the emblem of gentility), as in old times, every one of gentle blood in warm climates would be accompanied by his little plumed protector, who, perched on his patron's shoulder, would destroy and drive away his insect enemies; or, in the sultry mid-day, stand sentinel over his slumbers. Thus would the weak assist the strong, and the strong would be bound in gratitude to give shelter to the weak. We have ourselves seen times and places, where a brace of good flycatchers would have been worth a king's ransom.*

* See Humboldt's account of the winged insects on the Orinoco. — "How were you off for mosquitoes last night?" it seems, is the morning salutation in parts of South America, as "How do you do?" is here.

"The flycatcher," says White, "is, of all our summer birds the most mute and the most familiar; it also appears the last of any. It builds in a vine or sweetbriar, against the wall of a house, or on the end of a beam or plate, or in the hole of a wall, and often close to the post of a door, where people are going in and out all day long. This bird does not make the least pretension to song, but uses a little inward wailing note when it thinks its young in danger from cats or other annoyances. It breeds but once, and retires early."* It will build for several successive years in the same tree, if not the same place. One of them made its nest, for two years following, under the writer's study window, in a pear tree. It was very amusing to watch the old bird first catching her prey, and then feeding her young. If, however, she perceived she was watched, she would wait with her mouth full a long time, till the observer disappeared. This bird would probably have built many summers in the same place, but the gardener, who was cutting some boughs near, destroyed the poor flycatcher's nest, "*because he knew how all small birds ate his peas.*"

"This reminds me," says Humboldt, "of a salutation said to be used in China, and indicating the former state of the celestial empire, — "Tou vou hou;" or, "How were you off for serpents in your bed last night?" — *Personal Narrative.*

* Selborne.

In the United States there is a kind of fly-catcher, called the king bird, possessing some remarkable qualities; we will transcribe a few lines from the description given by the eloquent and indefatigable Wilson, who has so well illustrated the birds of those vast countries. We should premise, that the king bird is much larger than our little familiar friend, being eight inches long, and fourteen in circumference: — “ In the breeding season his extreme affection for his mate, and for his nest and young, makes him suspicious of every bird that happens to pass near his residence, so that he attacks without discrimination every intruder. In the months of May, June, and part of July, his life is one continued scene of broils and battles, in which, however, he generally comes off conqueror. Hawks and crows, and even the bald eagle, and the great black eagle, all equally dread a rencontre with this dauntless little champion, who, as soon as he perceives one of these last approaching, launches into the air to meet him, mounts to a considerable height above him, and darts down on his back, sometimes fixing there, to the great annoyance of his sovereign. He teases the eagle incessantly, sweeps upon him from right and left, remounts, that he may descend on his back with the greater violence, all the time keeping up a shrill and

rapid twittering; and continuing the attack for more than a mile, till he is relieved by some other of his tribe, equally eager for the contest." "In fields of pasture," continues Wilson, "he often takes his stand, on the tops of the mullein, and other rank weeds, near the cattle, and makes occasional sweeps after passing insects, particularly the large black gadfly, so terrifying to horses and cattle. His eye moves restlessly around him, traces the flight of an insect for a moment or two, then that of a second, and even a third, until he perceives one to his liking; when with a shrill scream he pursues it, seizes it, and returns to the same spot again to look for more. This habit is so conspicuous, that several intelligent farmers of my acquaintance are of opinion that he picks out only the drones, and never injures the working bees." *

Another family of summer visitors, the SWALLOWS, well deserves our attention and protection. Every one thinks he knows the common swallow, yet many do not know we have four kinds, perfectly distinct in their plumage and habits. The sand martin, who makes his nest deep-delled in some hanging bank, is not more different from our twittering blue-backed chimney swallow, than the latter from the loved

* Wilson's American Ornithology. Duodec — King Bird.



SWALLOW.

tenant of the jutting roof, the house martin; and all easily known from the long-winged active swifts, dark in plumage, circling in calm evenings at a great height, and screaming to each other in their airy race; from their frequenting church steeples and towers, their sombre look, and harsh boding voice, the latter birds have been ominously called in some places "devilings." The whole tribe live, and move, and have their being, in the air, and seem less indebted to the earth and the waters than any other of the feathered race. Their lives (for sleep is only "tired nature's sweet restorer") are spent upon the wing, chasing and destroying the insect enemies of man.

Shall we grudge them a nook beneath our projecting roof, and not remember Shakspeare's words?

— "This guest of summer,
The temple-haunting martlet, does approve

By his loved mansionry, that the heaven's breath
Smells wooingly here; no jutting, frieze, buttress,
Nor coigne of vantage, but this bird hath made
His pendent bed, and procreant cradle; — where they
Most breed and haunt, I have observed the air
Is delicate."

Mr. White gives a very interesting account of each of this tribe to which we refer, he says: —
"The CHIMNEY SWALLOW* is the first comer; making its nest five or six feet down the chimney, a crust of mud or dirt, mixed with short pieces of straw to render it tough and permanent; the nest is open at the top, and lined with fine grasses and feathers which are often collected as they float in the air. The swallow lays from four to six white eggs, dotted with red specks; and brings out her first brood about the last week in June, or first week in July. The progressive method by which the young are introduced into life, is very amusing; first they emerge from the shaft with difficulty enough; and often fall down into the rooms below: for a day or so they are fed on the chimney top, and then are conducted to the dead leafless bough of some tree; where, sitting in a row, they are attended with great assiduity, and may be called perchers. In a day or two

* "The song of the swallow consists of a strain, about one minute in continuance, prettily enough modulated, and repeated at intervals, and always ending with a shrill note rapidly shaken." — *Loudon's Mag. of Nat. Hist.*

more they become fliers, but are still unable to take their own food; therefore they play about near the place where the young are, hawking for flies; and when a mouthful is collected, at a certain signal given, the dam and nestling advance, rising towards each other, and meeting at an angle; the young one all the while uttering a little quick note of gratitude and complacency, that a person must have paid very little regard to the wonders of nature, who has not often remarked this feat." *

All the summer long is the swallow a most instructive pattern of unwearied industry and affection; for, from morning to night, while there is a family to be supported, she spends the whole day in skimming close to the ground, and executing the most sudden turns and quick evolutions.

The swallow (probably the male) announces the approach of birds of prey: as soon as the hawk appears, he calls all the swallows and martins about him; "who pursue in a body and buffet and strike their enemy, till they have driven him from the village; darting down from above on his back, and rising again in a perpendicular line, in perfect security." †

* Wilson, in his account of the American barn swallow, gives nearly the same relation respecting that bird.

† "When insects fly low, the swallows are forced to

In America there is a chimney swallow of somewhat the same habits as our own; but before chimneys were so plentiful, as now they are, it appears they were in the habit of building their nests in the inside of hollow trees; and even now, when they first arrive, great numbers roost together in such hollow trees, which are celebrated through the country as swallow trees. A person who watched the birds emerging in the morning from their snug retreat gives the following account of it:—
“They rushed out like a stream, as big as the hole would admit, and ascended in a perpendicular line, until they were above the height of the adjacent trees; then assumed a circular motion, performing their evolutions two or three times, but always in a larger circle; and then dispersed in every direction. A little before sundown they returned in immense numbers, forming several circular motions, and then descended like a stream into the hole from whence they came out in the morning.” *

follow; and we have seen,” says an observer, “the wily cat stretch herself on the sunny grass plot, with her legs extended, as if dead; the flies collect about her; the simple swallows (thinking no harm) dart down, with open bill, upon the flies; when puss, perceiving her prey within reach, makes a spring like a flash of lightning, and strikes down with her paw the poor thoughtless swallow.” —
Mag. Nat. Hist., No. xxiii.

* Wilson's American Ornithology.

A pleasing account of the swallow is given in Bewick's Birds, which will amply repay the perusal of a youthful enquirer:—"A young swallow soon became attached to the children who reared him; opened his mouth for flies as fast as he could be supplied, and was fed to a whistle. In a few days they used to take him into the fields with them; and as each child found a fly, and whistled, the little bird flew for his prey from one to the other. At other times he would fly round them in the air, but always descended at the first call, in spite of the constant endeavours of the wild swallows to seduce him away; for which purpose, several would fly round him, striving to drive him away when they saw him about to settle on the children's hands, extended with food." *

That amusing little bird, the HOUSE MARTIN, is also admirably described by Mr. White; who remarks, "that in building their nests they are careful not to do too much at once; lest, whilst the work is soft and green, it should pull itself down by its own weight; about half an inch seems a sufficient layer for a day. House martins are distinguished from their congeners by having their legs covered with soft downy feathers down to their toes. Martins are by far the least agile of the four species; accordingly,

* Bewick's British Birds.

they make use of a placid easy motion in a middle region of the air, seldom mounting to any great height, and never sweeping long together over the surface of the ground or water." *

The arms of a fourth child are known by the addition of a martin or martlet; inasmuch (say the quaint heralds of old times) as that bird with long wings and very short legs hath great pain to rise from the earth, so will a fourth brother, being so far removed from the main branch and the family estate, have much difficulty, without great exertion, to raise himself.

There are few more delightful and placid scenes than to view these beautiful and happy birds, in a warm summer's evening, sporting around us in the air, dipping into the smooth lake, and twittering with complacency and joy. We pity the unfortunate person whose mind does not in some measure take the hue of the hour, expanding with gratitude, and wishing happiness to every living thing.

In the amusing work on the architecture of birds, the author quotes a writer in the Gentleman's Magazine, who says:—"For my part I am not ashamed to own that I have tempted window swallows to build round my house, by fixing scallop shells in places convenient for them; and have been much pleased in observ-

* White.

ing, with what caution the little architect raises a buttress under each shell, before he ventures to form his nest on it." *

The Anglo-Americans have many contrivances for enticing birds to build near their houses; being particularly partial to the barn swallow, they fix up boxes for it to nestle in. The proprietor of a barn in that country assured Wilson, "that if a man permitted swallows to be shot, his cows would give bloody milk;" and also, "that no barn where swallows frequented would ever be struck by lightning." We wish this kind-hearted superstition were more general here; and think, as a reward is given by law (though somewhat obsolete) for the destruction of birds supposed to be injurious to man, so, as a matter of justice, there should be a fine on those who destroy birds friendly and advantageous to us. On this point we believe, all lovers of birds will agree with us. In approaching any mansion, we are always pleased with the sight of a number of martins and swallows playing about in security, and which almost indicate the disposition of the owner; as the well-fed sleek cattle, Southdown sheep, and large flock of copper-coloured turkeys near the the house, give note of hospitality within.

The celebrated American naturalist, Wilson,

* Library of Entertaining Knowledge.

quite enters into this feeling; and, describing the purple martin (a beautiful summer visitant in the United States), he says: — “The summer residence of this agreeable bird, is universally among the habitations of man; who, having no interest in his destruction, and deriving considerable advantage as well as amusement, from his company, is generally his friend and protector. Some people have large conveniences formed for the martins, with many apartments, which are usually fully tenanted, and occupied regularly every spring; and in such places particular individuals have been noticed to return to the same box for several successive years. Even the solitary Indian seems to have a particular respect for this bird. The Chactaws and Chickasaws cut off all the top branches from a sapling near their cabins, leaving the prongs a foot or two in length; on each side of which they hang a gourd, or calabash, properly hollowed out for their convenience.

“On the banks of the Mississippi, the negroes stick up long canes, with the same species of apartment fixed to their tops, in which the martins regularly breed. Wherever I have travelled in this country, I have seen with pleasure, the hospitality of the inhabitants to this favourite bird.” Elsewhere Wilson observes: — “I never met with more than one man who disliked the

martins, and would not permit them to settle about his house. This was a penurious close-fisted German; who hated them, because, as he said, 'they eat his peas.' I told him he must certainly be mistaken, as I never knew an instance of martins eating peas; but he replied with coolness, that he had many times seen them himself 'blaying near the hife, and going schnip schnap;' by which I understood that it was his bees that had been sufferers, and the charge could not be denied."*

The SAND or BANK MARTIN is the least of this tribe: his back is of a mouse colour hue, suited somewhat to the sand, rock, or clay bank, in which he drills a hole for his nest: these birds make their holes near together, so as to form a society, in some overhanging bank or cliff. We have often watched them clustered almost like bees at the mouths of their safe places; where the young probably come out for air and food, before they can fly much. They will sometimes alight in considerable numbers in the dusty road near their nests. They feed on gnats and small insects, and (Mr. White says) on dragon flies almost as long as themselves: he remarks likewise, with great accuracy, "their peculiar manner of flying, flitting about with odd jerks and vacillations not unlike the motions of the butterfly: doubtless," he continues,

* Wilson's American Ornithology. Purple Martin.

"the flight of all the swallow tribe is influenced by, and adapted to, the peculiar sort of insects which furnish them food. Willoughby says, they are sold in some parts of Spain as food, and are called by the country people, probably from their desultory jerking manner of flight, *la mariposa de las montañas*." * This is one of the few birds which appear to be common to Europe and America. Wilson, in describing them, says "he has often observed the common crow of that country, in parties of four or five, watching at the entrance of the holes, to seize the first straggling young that should make its appearance."

The SWIFT is easily known from all other birds by his rapid flight and dark plumage. The writer once watched many of these birds circling round the tower of the church at Kusnach, near Berne, in company with a magnificent foreign species, the great white-breasted swift: the latter gliding with more leisurely and measured pace, and floating as if in enjoyment on the air. These foreigners are double the size of our swift, with light-coloured breasts and dark wings, they looked like an aery of a hundred sparrow hawks, gliding round and round their favourite tower !

Old Walton, quoting from Sir Henry Wotton (ambassador to Venice in the time of Elizabeth),

* White.

says, the Italians amused themselves with a fly rod and line, in taking swallows. The species they thus entrap is the swift; and at Venice, from the top of St. Mark's pillar, in a calm evening, a person may still be occasionally seen waving to and fro his rod and line. The small hook is covered with a bit of cotton wool, which the poor victims take as it floats, probably to line their nests with. The bird angler, whom the writer saw, tore now and then some white paper into bits; which as it fell, eddying about in the currents of wind, attracted the birds to the spot, in the same way as what anglers call ground bait draws fish to a particular place.

The habits of these birds are excellently described by Mr. White, and little has been added to his gleanings:—"They arrive with us about the beginning of May, and depart early in August; building in crannies of castles and towers, and upon the tops of the walls of churches under the roof. It is a most alert bird," continues our author, "rising very early, and retiring to roost very late; and is on the wing, in the height of summer, full sixteen hours. In the longest days it does not retire to rest till a quarter before nine in the evening, being the latest of all day birds. Just before they retire, whole groups of them assemble high in the air, and squeak, and shoot about with

wonderful rapidity.* But this bird is never so much alive as in hot thundery weather; when it expresses great alacrity, and calls forth all its powers. In general, they feed in a much higher district than the other species; a proof that gnats and other insects do also abound to a considerable height in the air. They also range to vast distances; since locomotion is no labour to them. Sometimes they fly low over water, hawking for cadew and May flies just emerged out of their aurelia state."† The number of pairs of swifts visiting one place appears, from observations made at Selborne, to be the same.

This harmless and elegant tribe of birds have always been much cherished by mankind. "The swallow," says Sir H. Davy, "is one of my favourite birds, and a rival of the nightingale; for he glads my sense of seeing, as much as the other does my sense of hearing. He is the joyous prophet of the year — the harbinger of the best season: he lives a life of enjoyment amongst the loveliest forms of nature. Winter is unknown to him; and he leaves the green meadows of England in autumn, for the myrtle and orange groves of Italy, and the palms of Africa. He has always objects of pursuit, and his success is secure.

* Their notes resemble the words swee ree, pronounced in a shrill prolonged tone.

† White.

Even the beings selected for his prey are poetical, beautiful, and transient. The ephemeræ are saved, by his means, from a slow and lingering death in the evening, and killed in a moment, when they have known nothing of life but pleasure ! He is the constant destroyer of insects, the friend of man, and, with the stork and the ibis, may be regarded as a sacred bird. His instinct, which gives him his appointed season, and which teaches him always when and where to move, may be regarded as flowing from a divine source ; and he belongs to the oracles of nature, which speak the awful and intelligible language of a present Deity." *

It would not be difficult to collect many testimonies in favour of these light-winged visitors. "The swallow," says an accurate observer, "is a companion of man, and one of the most vigilant vedettes for the safety of the feathered race. No sooner does a hawk, or other bird or beast of prey, come in view, than he raises his shrill note of alarm, chee chee ; and whilst almost all other birds, pigeons, poultry, &c. fly or run to covert, the dauntless swallow mounts aloft to meet the foe, menacing and attacking with fury, till he drives the intruder from the neighbourhood. In this attack, the crow only has the courage to assist. I have often noticed

* Salmonia, p. 79.

that the swallows, on returning from the pursuit, unite in a song of gratulatory exultation. Gnats are the favourite food of the swallow. In this respect it may be considered the friend of man; not only in tropical countries, but in every place it visits." *

We have now given a cursory glance at most of the smaller summer birds which visit us; there are yet two or three others, each belonging to a distinct family, and worthy our attention from the singularity of their habits and notes.

The WRYNECK is one of these, distinguished by the beauty of its plumage, which, at first sight, almost resembles that of the woodcock, though our bird is scarcely the size of a lark. It is chiefly seen on the boughs and trunks of decayed trees, and gains its name from a singular mode of turning its head over its shoulder, alternately; still better, it is named emmet hunter, as it lives almost entirely on ants. "A quantity of mould, with emmets and their eggs, were given it; and it was curious to observe the tongue darted forward, and retracted, with such velocity, and with unerring aim, that it never returned without an ant or an egg adhering to it; not transfixed by the horny point, but re-

* Main, Mag. of Nat. Hist. No. xxi.

tained by a tenaceous moisture, provided by nature for that purpose." * It makes a singular noise, a sort of bleating, like some small hawks in the spring; and we have often, formerly, listened to it with surprise, wondering whence that sound could proceed.

In Gloucestershire this bird is called the cuckoo's maid, being supposed to attend the cuckoo. Mr. White says, "these birds appear on the grass plots and walks; they walk a little as well as hop, and thrust their bills into the turf, in quest, I conclude, of ants: while they hold their bills in the grass, they draw out their prey with their tongues, which are so long as to be coiled round their heads." †

The RING OUZEL, nearly resembling the common blackbird, but with a white ring round his neck, visits some of our mountainous heaths to make his nest; but being of rare occurrence, and a local bird, we will not notice him farther. Mr. White gives an account of his discovery of these birds in Hampshire, in October; and we have seen them near the Isle of Thanet, in Kent, in the same month, probably on their return southward after rearing their young. They are said to breed on Dartmoor, and in the Peak in Derbyshire; and we have observed them among

* Montagu.

† Selborne.

the heath on the Welch mountains in July. Sir W. Jardine says, — “Before migrating to their winter quarters, they leave their mountainous haunts and descend to the nearest gardens; where they commit numerous depredations, and are known to the country people under the title of ‘mountain blackbirds.’ We have not often met with them, but, as old Walton says, ‘we hope our honest reader may, and have good amusement therewith.’”

There are two insect-eating birds, both, of course, summer visitors; and which, though larger than any we have noticed, yet, as they are not unfrequently seen and heard about our woods and shrubberies, must not be altogether forgotten. One of these feeds in the day, the other earns his subsistence in the twilight and the night.

The well known “plain song Cuckoo grey”



CUCKOO .

comes to us in April, deposits its egg in the the nest of some other bird, and leaves us in the autumn. It generally chooses the hedge sparrow, water wagtail, or titlark, as the foster mother of its young. The young cuckoo (like many other intruders) acts with great ingratitude towards its benefactors, by ejecting the rightful heirs from bed and board, and devouring their substance. Mr. Montagu gives an entertaining account of this process.* The egg of the cuckoo is smaller in proportion to the size of the bird than most others, which prevents the great disparity which would otherwise appear when it is placed in the nest of the little dupes who hatch it; and there are no insect-eating birds of the same size, in whose nest it could be deposited. Mr. White gives a very amusing account of the fierceness of a young cuckoo which he found in the nest of a titlark, "who pursued his finger, as it was teased, many feet from the nest, sparing and buffeting with its wings like a game

* Mr. Montagu witnessed a young cuckoo throw out a young swallow, which was placed in the nest as an experiment, the foster nestlings (hedge sparrows) having before been ousted. "This singular action was performed by insinuating itself under the swallow, and with its rump forcing it out of the nest with a sort of jerk." — Montagu's "Ornithological Dictionary," and also Dr. Jenner's "History of the Cuckoo," and Rennie's "Architecture of Birds."

cock." We have seen one in the nest of a hedge sparrow, gape and threaten in the same terrific manner. Mr. White also saw cuckoos skimming over a large pond, and feeding on the libellulæ or dragon flies, some of which were caught as they settled on the weeds, and some as they were on the wing.

It appears, by Vaillant's account, that the African cuckoos in like manner deposit their eggs in the nests of other birds; all of which, as with us, are insect eaters: and he thinks the cuckoo carries her egg in her mouth, for the purpose of placing it safely. This feat of carrying the egg in a bird's mouth, is performed by the American cat bird, a sort of thrush.*

All poets, naturalists, and writers of pastorals "babble about green fields and cuckoos;" as the bird is so well known, we will add little more about it.

We have shot the young cuckoo before his grey plumage was matured, and found him then elegantly mottled with brown and black, very fierce and pugnacious, with a harsh voice; so

* The celebrated naturalist Audubon watched the American Goatsucker do this. "When it discovers," says he, "that its eggs have been touched, it appears extremely dejected, and after a few low notes, and some gesticulations, all indicative of great distress, it takes an egg into its large mouth, and its mate does the same, when they would fly off together, skimming closely over the ground."

that we are not surprised at many of the small birds mobbing him, and apparently mistaking him for one of the smaller hawks; certainly he has no great claim on their consideration, as, according to the calculation of a writer quoted by Mr. Rennie, the cuckoo annually destroys about 3,500,000 of the eggs of insect-eating birds; reckoning the number of hen cuckoos at 140,000, each laying five eggs, and each rogue of a young cuckoo destroying, by his summary method of ejection, five foster brethren.* This we think is somewhat over-stated.

It has lately been ascertained, that in North America there is a bird having the same habit as our cuckoo, of laying its egg in the nest of other birds, and leaving them to hatch and rear its progeny. This is the cow bunting; a hard billed bird; a migratory species, coming in great numbers, often in company with other gregarious birds. They do not seem to pair like most others; and, what is extraordinary, though almost all those birds in whose nest the cow bunting deposits its egg are smaller than itself, yet the intruder's egg, which is the largest, is always hatched first, and in consequence they neglect perfecting incubation for their own offspring to

* The amusing work published in the numbers of "Entertaining Knowledge," by the Society for promoting Useful Knowledge.

attend on the new comer ; the unhatched eggs are soon after ejected, either by the parent birds, as addled, or by this half brother (more heartless than Joseph's brethren of old). The poor foster mothers do not at first view with any complacency the egg of the stranger. A correspondent of Wilson's relates their behaviour : — " A blue bird having nearly finished her nest, and having left it, a female cow bird darted into it, and in five minutes returned, and sailed off to her companions with seeming delight, which she expressed by her gestures and notes. The blue bird soon returned, but instantaneously fluttered back with much apparent hesitation ; uttering a rapidly repeated note of complaint and resentment, which soon brought the male, who reciprocated her feelings by every demonstration of the most vindictive nature. They entered the nest together, and returned several times, uttering their uninterrupted complaints for ten or fifteen minutes. The male then darted away to the neighbouring trees, as if in search of the offender, and fell upon a cat bird, which he chastised severely ; and then turned to an innocent sparrow, that was chanting its ditty in a peach tree." In this instance I determined to watch the occurrences that were to follow ; but on one of my morning visits, I found the common enemy of the eggs and young of all the

small birds had despoiled the nest; a coluber snake was found coiled in the hollow, and the eggs sucked. *

The DOR HAWK, formerly calumniated under the name of the goatsucker†, is about the size of the cuckoo. It generally remains hidden in the day in some sequestered dell, or amid shrubs and fern. In the evening it comes forth, and we hear its humming sound, as of a wheel going round rapidly. It flies about in the twilight like a swallow of the night, hawking after beetles and other night flying insects; these it is the better able to take, in opening its very capacious mouth, by means of some bristles on each side sticking out like palisades, to prevent its fugitive prey escaping. We have seen it amid the oak woods, in the Welsh hills, busy early in the evening, and often lighting on the ground, as if for rest, or to devour its food.

Mr. White has given an accurate description of the habits of this curious bird: — “It generally,” says he, “utters its jarring note sitting on a bough; and I have watched it for half an hour together, as it sat with its under mandible quivering. It perches usually on a bare twig,

* Wilson.

† This bird is also called churn owl, fern owl, night hawk, wheel bird, and night jar.

with its head lower than its tail. The bird also sometimes gives a small squeak, repeated four or five times."

There is one American species, called the "whip poor Will," whose coming is excellently described by Wilson:—"About the 25th of April," says he, "if the season be not uncommonly cold, the 'whip poor Will' is heard in Pennsylvania, in the evening as the dusk of twilight commences, or in the morning as soon as the dawn has broke. The notes of this solitary bird, from the ideas which are naturally associated with them, seem like the voice of an old friend, and are listened to by almost all with great interest. At first they issue from some retired part of the woods, the glen, or mountain. In a few evenings, we hear them from the adjoining coppice, the garden fence, the road before the door, and even the roof of the dwelling-house, hours after the family have retired to rest: towards midnight, they generally become silent, unless in clear moonlight, when they are heard with little intermission till morning."

An interesting account of a South American species is given by an entertaining traveller:—"When the sun has sunk in the western woods, no longer agitated by the breeze, then it is that the goatsucker comes out of the forest,

where it has sat all day long in slumbering ease, unmindful of the gay and busy scenes around it. Poor injured little bird of night, how foul a stain has inattention to facts put upon thy character ! When the moon shines bright, you have a fair opportunity of examining the goat-sucker. You will see it close by the cows, goats, and sheep, jumping up every now and then under their bellies. Approach a little nearer ; he is not shy ! ‘He fears no danger, for he knows no sin.’ See how the nocturnal flies are tormenting the herd, and with what dexterity he springs up and catches them as fast as they alight on the belly, legs, and udder of the animals. Observe how quiet they stand, and how sensible they seem of his good offices : were you to dissect him, and inspect his stomach, you would find no milk there : it is full of the flies which have been annoying the herd. There are nine species here ; the largest, nearly the size of the English wood owl. When night reigns over these immeasurable wilds, whilst lying in your hammock, you will hear this goatsucker lamenting like one in deep distress. A stranger would never conceive it to be the note of a bird. He would say ‘it was the departing voice of a midnight murdered victim, or the last wailing of Niobe for her poor children, before she was turned into stone.’ Suppose yourself in hope-

less sorrow; begin with a high loud note, and pronounce 'Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!' each note lower and lower, till the last is scarcely heard, pausing a moment or two betwixt every note, and you will have some idea of the moaning of the largest goatsucker of Demarara. Four other species of the goatsucker articulate some words so distinctly, that they have received their names from the sentences they utter, and absolutely bewilder the stranger on his arrival in these parts. The most common one sits down close by your door, and flies and alights three or four yards before you, as you walk along the road, crying 'Who are you? who, who, who, are you?' Another bids you 'work away, work, work, work away.' A third cries, mournfully, 'Willy, come, go, — Willy, Willy, Willy, — come, go.' And, high up in the country, a fourth tells you to 'Whip poor Will, — whip, whip, whip poor Will.'

"You will never persuade the negro to destroy these birds, or get the Indian to let fly his arrow at them. They are birds of omen and reverential dread. Jumbo, the Demon of Africa, has them under his command; and they equally obey the Yabahou, or Demarara Indian Devil. They are the receptacles for departed souls, who come back again to earth, unable to rest for crimes done in their days of

nature: or they are expressly sent by Jumbo or Yabahou to haunt cruel and hard-hearted masters, and retaliate injuries received from them. If the largest goatsucker chance to cry near the white man's door, sorrow and grief will soon be inside. If it be heard close to the negro's or Indian's hut, from that night misfortune sits brooding over it, and they await the event in terrible suspense. You will forgive the poor Indian of Guiana for this. He knows no better; he has nobody to teach him." *

In the United States, a similar superstitious dread of these poor birds is felt. "I will not," says Wilson, "state the notions generally entertained of them by the Indians. It is, however, easy to observe that this, like the owl and other nocturnal birds, is held by them in a kind of suspicious awe, as a bird with which they wish to have as little to do as possible. In North America there are three species: one the night hawk, which, on gloomy days, is often seen high in the air in chase of insects; also the whip poor Will, and another kind called, from its note 'Chuck Will's widow.'"

Mr. White gives an amusing account of the British goatsucker, or fern owl. Its mode of sitting along instead of across a bough, with its

* Waterton's Wanderings in Guiana,

head lowest, and curious jarring note. The middle claw is serrated, probably for holding its prey; which it seems sometimes to take with the foot or talon as a hawk would, and by a bend of the head deliver into the mouth, on the wing.

As our summer visitors find the autumn approaching, they exercise their young ones in short flights, preparatory to migration. The caterpillars and chrysalis having passed through their winged state, as butterflies, moths, and flies, laid their eggs and perished, the scarcity of food, and the warnings of winter urge the departure of these feathered guests.

Mr. White gives the following as a list of the summer (small) birds of passage in Hampshire: —

1. Wryneck - Middle of March.
2. Smallest Willow - March 23.
Wren (Chiffchaff)
3. Swallow - April 13.
4. Martin - April 13.
5. Sand Martin - April 13.
6. Blackcap - April 13. A sweet wild note.
7. Nightingale - Beginning of April.
8. Cuckoo - Middle of April.
9. Middle Willow - Middle of April. A sweet plaintive note.
Wren
10. Whitethroat - Middle of April. Mean note.
11. Redstart - Middle of April. More agreeable.
12. Grasshopper Lark Mid. of April. Small sibilous note.

13. Swift - About April 27.
 14. Lesser Reed - A sweet polyglot, but hurrying.
 Sparrow (Sedge Warbler)
 15. Largest Willow - Tops of high beeches; end of
 Wren (Wood April.
 Wren)
 16. Goatsucker - Beginning of May; chatters by
 night.
 17. Flycatcher - May 12. Last summer visitant.
 All are later farther north, and some do not arrive there.

There is one interesting family of soft billed birds, consisting of three species, worthy our notice, viz. the WAGTAILS. The common black and white, or pied wagtail, remains with us at all times: frequenting shallow streams, and the edges of pits and plashes; running here and there, uttering a cheerful chirp, and flying in jerks; often called by the common people the dish-washer and washerwoman. "While cows are feeding in low, moist pastures, broods of wagtails run round them close up to their noses, and under their very bellies; availing themselves of the flies that settle on their legs, and, probably, feeding on the worms and larvæ that are roused by the trampling of their feet." *

Another elegant species, with a yellow breast, and fine grey back, visits us in autumn, remains

* White.

during winter about our warm spring heads, and leaves us in spring for the north.

The third, called the YELLOW or SPRING WAGTAIL, arrives in the spring, and staying the summer, departs south in autumn. This sort is lighter in figure than the others, of a fine sulphur colour, and is more partial to ploughed fields and upland pastures than its brethren. It is often seen among sheep, and is hence called by Buffon *bergeronette de printemps*, or little shepherdess of the spring. Sometimes they are seen in flocks of twenty, or more, dispersed over half a field; chasing the insects, picking up what is to be found, chirruping to each other, and balancing up and down on their legs. The two latter species, though to a certain degree migratory, do not, probably, entirely leave our country. All these birds are remarkably active, cheerful, and engaging in appearance. They run merrily along the margins of our small streams; sometimes coursing over an island of water-cresses, or other aquatic plants, in search of insects, or disporting on the shaven grass plots near our houses. What quick observant eyes each of these birds possesses! no little smooth caterpillar, though no bigger than a midge, hanging on the lower side the stem of a grass, escapes their prying search!

We have often paused to look at a pool, or

slow stream, almost matted over with that beautiful flower, the white water lily. The common moor hen walks across it, flirting up her tail, and pecking here and there. The water rail lightly treads upon it, as her proper path, and eyes all her foes on shore in security. And the wagtails, pacing leisurely on the broad leaves (their well-spread carpet), look curiously into every flower as they pass.

CHAP. III.

RESIDENT BIRDS.

THE third division, viz. sojourners or RESIDENT BIRDS, remain to be considered. Of these, only five belong to the soft billed birds ; the rest are able to feed themselves on grain, berries, and wild fruits, which they can find in the hardest weather. The five which, notwithstanding the departure of all their tuneful comrades, remain faithfully with us, though rain and hail beat dark December, seem especially to demand our protection ; and two of them, at least, have always received it, — the robin and the wren. It is remarked, by an accurate and pleasing author, that the former has some familiar name given him, in all European countries : about Bornholm, Tomme-Liden ; in Norway, Peter Ronjmad ; in Germany, Thomas Gierdet ; and with us Robin redbreast, or ruddock.* Every one is acquainted with this familiar and interesting bird ; its song is singularly pleasing. In a scale

* Supplement to Pennant's British Zoology.

of the qualities of singing birds, made by an ingenious observer, the robin stands very high.*

"Few observers of nature can have passed unheeded the sweetness and peculiarity of note of the ROBIN, and its various indications with regard to atmospheric changes. The mellow liquid notes of spring and summer, the melancholy sweet pipings of autumn, and the jerking chirps of winter. He may be considered as part of the naturalist's barometer. On a summer evening, though the weather be unsettled, he sometimes takes his stand on the topmost twig that looks up to the sky, or on the house-top, singing cheerfully and sweetly: when this is observed, it is an unerring promise of succeeding fine weather."†

The WREN also is a general favourite: even his nest (and as snug and comfortable a nest it is as bird need desire, being covered over and well sheltered from all weather,) is shielded by a fortunate superstition from the depredation of schoolboys, who remember the old line, —

"The robin and the wren are God's cock and hen."

This little, brown, active bird, bustling and prying into every dark recess, with his short tail erect, and every now and then pouring

* Hon. Daines Barrington on the singing of birds, Supplement to Pennant's British Zoology.

† Mag. Nat. Hist. No. xxi.

forth his best energies in song, can never pass unnoticed. In America he is also found; and another species of nearly similar habits. Wilson relates of the latter the following anecdote: — “In the month of June, a mower hung up his coat, under a shed near the barn: two or three days elapsed before he had occasion to put it on again: thrusting his arm up the sleeve, he found it completely filled with some rubbish, as he expressed it; and on extracting the whole mass, found it to be the nest of a wren, completely finished, and lined with a large quantity of feathers. In his retreat he was followed by the little forlorn proprietors, who scolded him with great vehemence for thus ruining the whole economy of their household affairs.” The same author relates the behaviour of one of these birds, whose mate had been killed. — “On returning, at first he sung with great vivacity for an hour or so; but becoming uneasy, went off for half an hour: then returning, chanted as before; went to the top of the house, stable, and weeping willow, that she might hear him; but seeing no appearance of her, he returned once more, visited the nest, ventured cautiously into the window, gazed about with suspicious looks; his voice sinking to a low melancholy note, as he stretched his little neck about in all directions. Returning to the box, he seemed for some time at a loss what to do,

and soon after went off. The little widower, however, succeeded in getting subsequently another mate, and reared a brood of seven young safely.”*

The wren sometimes lays as many as eighteen eggs, but more commonly six or eight; whence Willoughby remarks, — “It is strange to admiration, that so small a bodied bird should feed such a company of young, and not miss one bird.”† The eggs look almost like so many noble pearls lying together.‡

One of the others also, in hard weather, seems, with the robin and wren, to seek our aid by frequenting drains and rubbish, close to our houses, and trying to eke out its sustenance from the refuse we throw away. It is the hedge warbler, or hedge sparrow §, sometimes carelessly confounded with the pert pillager of the same name, from which it differs as much in form as in its gentle and inoffensive habits. Its plumage is dark and unpretending, and its beautiful green egg is generally the first the child obtains; as the nest is placed so low in the hedge, that a curious urchin can easily peep

* Wilson.

† Architecture of Birds, where there are some excellent descriptions and plates of the nests of British Birds.

‡ Vide Graves’s Eggs of Birds.

§ White, Letter 41.

into it: hence the cuckoo is apt to deposit her egg in it, and more cuckoos are fostered by this bird than by any other.

The BLACK and WHITE WATER WAGTAIL, and the GOLDEN-CRESTED WREN, likewise remain with us during winter; the former frequenting warm spring heads and floated meadows: the latter is the smallest British bird. Its green hue is well suited to the colour of the evergreen firs, amid the branches of which its industrious life is spent, looking, with unwearied care, for the larvæ of insects, and searching the underside of all the small boughs; its little cry is heard in the highest spruce firs, and its beautiful orange crest distinguishes it from every other of our feathered friends. An inattentive observer would never see it, though he walked daily under the trees wherein it dwelt.* Might not the children of the family, who usually walk out after breakfast in winter, take with them a little bread which had been steeped in water or milk during their meal, and place it in the haunts of these humble sojourners?

There are four little dwellers with us, to which we would call the attention of our young friends before we speak of others; they each constitute a family separate from all the rest in formation and habits. The first is the NUT-

* Architecture of Birds, p. 318.



NUTHATCH.

NUTHATCH, a little bird with a grey back, buff-coloured breast, and black streak through the eye down the neck; he is like a woodpecker in miniature, being scarcely larger than a sparrow. This little fellow chiefly frequents woods; he fixes a nut firm in a chink, and turns on all sides to strike it with advantage. "It is no uncommon thing to find, in the autumn, in the crevices of the bark of an old tree, a great many broken nut-shells, the work of this bird, who repeatedly returns to the same spot, for this purpose." * Mr. White often used to carry nuts, and place them in the crack of a gate post, for his hacking friend to break them.† Its hammering noise relieves the silence of the woods, and may be heard a furlong off. It chooses the deserted habitation of a wood-pecker, in some tree, for a nest, and skilfully contracts the hole by a plaster of clay. No persecution will drive this little bird from its nest, when sit-

* Montagu. † Selborne.

ting, which it defends to the last, and will sooner be taken than quit its eggs.* In that amusing work the *Magazine of Natural History*, is an article on the manners of the nuthatch. The one described was a captured bird; in spite of a wound in his wing, he became familiar, fed immediately, attacked a lark in the same cage, and kept the house alive by battering "the frame of his prison, the sound of which, both from the loudness and prolongation of noise, was only to be compared to the efforts of a fashionable footman, on a fashionable door, in a fashionable square."† Buffon says this bird fortifies the clay rampart of his nest with bits of stone; hence he is called *picmaçon*. The peasants of France have a tale, that if the male bird meet the female wandering from home, he beats her; whence they have a proverb, and call a husband who conducts his domestic affairs sagely, by the name of this bird. Buffon, however, with the gallantry of his nation, rescues our nuthatch from this sad imputation, and shows, that (not understanding good manners) these rude peasants have mistaken the warm caresses of affection for correction!‡ The nuthatch runs up or down the side of a tree, with

* Montagu.

† Mag. of Nat. Hist. No. iv.

‡ Buffon, Sitelle.

ease, and holds an intermediate place between a woodpecker and titmouse.

The other diminutive dweller we are about to notice, is the TREE CREEPER, a singular and elegant little bird, covered with streaks of black and brown, with a breast of silvery white; the bill is slender and beautifully curved. It is always creeping up and down the limbs and trunks of trees in search of insects, its only food, and searches particularly all the mossy places, so that it might be called the moss-hunter: its motion is interrupted, creeping a few inches quickly, then stopping, looking sharply on each side, and then again proceeding; it has a monotonous and weak note, and when first we see it, we fancy there is a mouse upon the tree; it is not rare, but, if observed, immediately creeps to the other side of the tree or bough, and turns from him as the spectator follows it. Next to the golden-crested wren, it is one of the most industrious enemies of the dormant insect race; and, if turned together into a green-house they would soon disturb and destroy the latent insects and their eggs. *We remember having heard of a pack of ants being turned loose in a currant bush, upon the caterpillars, and confined to their quarters by a ring of tar round the stem. It is said, they hunted over every spot, and cleared the tree in*

a most effectual manner ! Our creeper never perches on a twig ; but, when disturbed, flits to another tree, hooks himself on the bark, and ascends it, often in a spiral direction. By following him gently round, he may be made to work his way up like the thread of a corkscrew.*

The other birds we are considering, who sojourn always in our land, are, with the few exceptions alluded to, hard billed, and able to obtain their food at all seasons : nor is there one among them whose habits are not full of interest to a watchful observer, and may give additional pleasure to a country walk. They differ from each other more than the different nations of the earth have different languages, costumes, food, and customs, and are more pertinacious to their habits even than the unchangeable Chinese (who have, however, very nearly reduced reason to instinct). Successive generations dwell together in the same woods or fields, and yet never in a free state, or borrow a habit or permanently adopt a note from their neighbours.

The BLACKBIRD and THRUSH, assimilated in several points, build in the same bush, live in the same place, sing from different parts of the

* Wilson, ii. p. 147.

same tree, still their songs and their nests differ in the same way as they did thousands of years ago; yet it seems ascertained by experiment that many birds have the faculty of imitation, and that their song is learned from their parents; so that, when taken before their notes are fixed, young birds take the song of a bird placed near them as a finishing governess*; or, without such education, have a very imperfect song.† Neither was it ever known that wild birds paired with other than their own tribe; the brilliant plumage and melodious voice of the goldfinch has no charms for the sober linnet, who prefers the society of his dusky mate.

Though our feathered friends do not adopt the customs of foreigners, they can adapt themselves to a change of circumstances. The swallow did not always build in chimneys, nor the swift nor jackdaw in the roofs of houses, or the towers of churches; chimneys and churches, compared with swallows and jackdaws, are but modern introductions to our island. So, in making their nests, birds will

* Wilson, ii. p. 92. Experiments on the singing of birds, by the Hon. Daines Barrington, appendix to second volume of Pennant's British Zoology. Mr. Montagu (a most accurate observer) thinks the notes innate.

† Buffon's amusing account of the bullfinch.

take to a new material which falls in their way, and we know, to our cost, how soon they betake themselves to a new grain or fruit introduced into our gardens.* We know not whether different races of birds understand each other's language; they certainly comprehend the note of alarm, as any one may easily verify by observation.

Hearing the common wren (who is a great alarmist), we turned to the spot, and saw this minute bird, with every feather in agitation, bending downwards and continually changing his place: the hedge sparrow joined in the cry, occasionally opening and shutting his wings, and uttering his weak voice, but keeping at the top of the shrub far from danger; whilst the robin, more courageous, approached the invader, ruffling his feathers, repeating, in loud key, the alarm note, yet ready, instantly, to retreat from the peril. A cat prowling for prey, was the cause of this uproar in the shrubbery. Linnæus called the cat, *Leo Murium*†; it

* Some time since we grew some Indian corn, one warm summer, in the open ground; as it began to get ripe the wild pheasants, who occasionally visited the place, discovered somehow it was good to eat, though they could not see the grains, and pecked their way through the tough husky covering which envelopes each ear.

† The lion of the mice.

might also be named, *Tigris Avicularum*.^{*} Of all song birds, the blackbird seems the best and most careful watchman.

An attentive observer finds great pleasure in listening to the notes of birds, not merely when they pour forth the full volume of their song, but even in their colloquial and more familiar tones. To distinguish their notes, requires but a little practice and a tolerable ear. A friend of Mr. White's, (himself the most attentive observer of British birds,) said, that the owls of his neighbourhood "used to hoot in B flat; but one went almost half a note below A."[†]

Without attaining such nicety, we may soon know the note of every tribe inhabiting our shrubberies. The language and manner of many is very significant. When the missel thrush (a common inhabitant of our orchards in the spring) screams to his partner, and, ruffling his feathers, flies with loud cries to repel the magpie or sparrow hawk, who visits his domain[‡], nothing can tell more plainly that all his energies are awakened for a des-

^{*} The tiger of small birds.

[†] Selborne, Letter 9. Mr. Knapp was acquainted with one thrush, who always pronounced, in song, the words, "lady-bird, lady-bird."

[‡] The Welsh called the missel pen y llwyn, or head of the coppice, from his fierceness.

perate enterprise. The soft note of the turtle dove cooing to his mate, his gentle manner and constant attention to her, have always been held to speak attachment. *

The chaffinch, found in every shrubbery (though no distinguished songster) has a remarkably cheerful carol. Immediately after a shower, from some low tree, his light short song is poured forth as if in spontaneous gratitude it said, "To thee we sing!"

Does not the quick twitter of the young swallows, sitting on some rail, whenever their indefatigable parent birds approach with food, denote joyful satisfaction? Who has listened to the swelling voice of the skylark —

"When upward springing blythe to greet
The purpling East,"

and does not feel that, proud of his lay and pouring out the tide of song, he is, for a while, (to borrow another line from Burns) —

"O'er a' the ills o' life victorious?"

Even the common sparrow, descending near us, hopping pertly along, eyeing us askance, in

* "The hopeless woe of settled sorrow swelling the heart of female innocence itself, could not assume tones more sad, more tender, and affecting," says Wilson, in speaking of the American turtle-dove.

his short familiar interrogatory note, says, plain enough, "Well, who are you?"

The sojourners or dwellers with us, whom we are about to consider, are divided into different kinds, easily known by the formation of the beak, and other particulars described in books on this subject; as the thrushes, grosbeaks, buntings, finches, larks, titmice, &c. comprising about thirty birds, who always remain with us, of the hard billed kinds: besides five or six soft billed birds, who also face our winters.

The thrushes who remain with us are only three, — the missel, the blackbird, and the throstle; the two latter are excellent songsters.* We have often watched the MISSEL stocking up dry cakes of cowdung (which he spread in the operation); and on turning up some to find the object he was in search of, found the large lead-coloured grub with a yellow head, which had been hatched there.

The BLACKBIRD and THRUSH are often esteemed the gardener's enemies, because they take a share of his currants and gooseberries; but, in return, they destroy the shell snails, (whose defence they skilfully break against a stone). In this occupation they are frequently

* Mag. Nat. Hist. vol. iv. pp. 144. 183.

engaged during the heat of the day, when they are to be found in summer amid thick beds of cabbages and potatoes in the garden; here, hopping up and down between the rows, they rout out the snails, who had crept into this cool retreat.

Besides the fieldfare and redwing, (winter visitors before mentioned, belonging to this tribe,) the ring ousel, a beautiful local species already mentioned, is a summer visitant, and makes its nest in some of our wild districts covered with heath, retreating to the south in winter. We cannot tell why the redwing, so nearly resembling our common thrush in conformation, should always abandon us for the north in summer; or why the ring ousel, so like our blackbird *, except in wearing a white collar, should as constantly leave us for the south, in winter. The mocking bird, thrasher, and best songsters of America, belong to this musical tribe.

Of the grosbeaks, there are but two who constantly remain with us, the GREENFINCH or greenbird, and the bullfinch †; for, though commonly called finches, they do not belong to the finch tribe. The former is a common bird, especially in winter, when it approaches barns and homesteads; and with the common sparrow,

* Both "black like an ousel."

† Mag. Nat. Hist. vol. iv. p. 417.

yellow bunting, and chaffinch, joins in forming those flocks of small birds that in hard weather beset the farmer's fold and rickyard. The BULLFINCH is well known from its beautiful plumage of red, blue, and black; it appears to be one of the few species that are constant through the whole year in their attachments, and perhaps, like the common crow, a pair are wedded for the term of life. Their docility in song is remarkable: — "I once had a nest of bullfinches given me," says Mrs. Charlotte Smith*; "of which only one was reared: it was a hen, which I kept only because I had reared it; but she hung in the same room with a very fine Virginian nightingale, whose song she soon acquired, and went through the same notes in a lower and softer tone." Another author remarks, that the female answers the purpose of a call bird as well as the male, which is not experienced in any other bird taken by the London bird-catchers.† Buffon also praises highly the docility and talents of both sexes.

* See her pleasing "Natural History of Birds."

† Hon. Daines Barrington on the small birds of flight, "Appendix to Pennant's British Zoology." — A friend informs us, that the Bullfinches imported from Germany have been chiefly taught to sing by weavers whilst at work at their looms, which is said to account for the bird's beginning to sing when the head of a person standing before him is moved backwards and forwards.

The bunting, our next tribe, has nothing very remarkable, consisting only of three birds dwelling here, and one scarce winter visitant, the snowy, or tawny bunting, according to its summer or winter costume. The COMMON BUNTING, often called the bunting lark (though it has no affinity to the larks but in its sober plumage), is common about farms; in winter it becomes gregarious, and is the largest bird amid those flocks which throng the rickyard in hard weather. * The YELLOW BUNTING (well named citrinella or lemon colour) is one of our commonest birds: its monotonous chant is almost the only one often heard by the traveller in the heat of the day, consisting (like the buntings) of the same note repeated quickly four or five times, and then one a little higher drawled out in lengthened cadence. The REED BUNTING, well known by his black head, is a handsome bird, found in and near most reedy places, rather remarkable for the undeserved reputation he has obtained for his song, than for any merit of his own. "There can be no doubt," says that accurate observer, Mr. Montagu, "that the nest as well as song of the sedge warbler, have been taken and confounded

* "It is especially seen among them (says Buffon) on rainy days." Sir W. Jardine thinks many arrive from Sweden and Norway, in autumn.

for those of this bird; for, as they both frequent the same places in the breeding season, that elegant little warbler is pouring forth its varied notes, concealed in the thickest part of a bush; while this is conspicuously perched above, whose tune is not deserving the name of song, consisting only of two notes, the first repeated three or four times, the last single and more sharp." Besides those above alluded to, one local species (discovered in Devonshire by Mr. Montagu), the ciril bunting, differs little from the common yellow hammer.

The FINCH tribe present to us several birds almost always found in our shrubberies or fields, and each interesting to an observer.

That common pillager, the SPARROW, is known to all. Even he is not without his use; and his cheerful chirp (the only note which comes "to those in populous cities pent,") is pleasure to the ear of a plodding citizen. In the most thickly peopled parts of London, this pert, familiar bird (a dingy denizen) is found, forming his nest securely amid the roofs and chimneys, pecking up every refuse morsel, and in early morning, before the world is abroad, assisting the other scavengers to clear the streets.*

* One pair (says an observer) will often bring up fourteen young ones in a season. Their ingenuity in attaching their nests beneath those of the Rook, making use of their

The MOUNTAIN or TREE SPARROW is not so local a species as some have supposed ; both sexes, as Mr. Montagu discovered, nearly resembling the common cock sparrow, though rather less. We have found it near Shrewsbury ; its manners are of a much less obtrusive nature than those of the house sparrow, and it is found about oak and elm trees somewhat decayed ; and a distinct black mark, a little below the back part of the eye, easily distinguishes it, besides its smaller size.*

The CHAFFINCH builds a most elegant nest, furnished with materials and mosses of the colour of the place near it. We have no more cheerful bird around us : his colours are brilliant, his motions lively, and his song, though simple, is gay and varied. A cruel method of blinding this poor bird (in order that he may sing longer) is practised, especially abroad. In Flanders, we have often seen it exposed in the

neighbour's structure as a defence against depredation, manifests their contrivance for the safety of their young.
— *Journal of a Naturalist.*

* An interesting account of the small birds of flight, and the method of their capture in clap-nets by the London bird-catchers, is given in the Appendix to Pennant's *British Zoology*. These flights, or internal migrations, take place early in the spring and in the autumn. The Pipit-lark, Wood-lark, Linnet, Goldfinch, Chaffinch, and Greenfinch are enumerated ; all sojourners, and hard billed birds.

market "blind, and in prison, to be sold as a slave." "Ah!" said our French *laquais de place*, "he never lives long; but dies of *ennui*, for the want of society." The Latin name given to the chaffinch is *ccelebs*, or bachelor, because, at one time of year, the sexes congregate separately; the gentlemen chiefly remain with us, but the ladies often visit foreign parts.*

The GOLDFINCH, sometimes called sheriff's-man, or seven-coloured linnet, is one of the most brilliant little birds of this world, and his costume would not disgrace a peacock's levee. If the farmer has neglected his fields, and the thistles are abundant and coming into seed, there shall we find our handsome finch busy, endeavouring to mitigate the evil: his song is as pleasing as his plumage is attractive, and his docility in confinement greater than any other bird; so that his whole demeanour is worthy of a lady's regard. †

* White's Selborne, Letters 8. and 13.

† An amusing account of the nest of the Goldfinch is given in the Architecture of Birds. An observer says: "These birds had formed the ground-work of their nest with moss, grass, &c. as usual; but on my scattering small parcels of wool, they in great measure left off the use of their own stuff, and employed the wool; afterwards I supplied them with cotton, on which they rejected the wool; and then I gave them fine down, on which they forsook both the other materials."

He, too, is fond of society; and when a little mirror is placed in his cage, as is sometimes the case, "he may be seen," says Buffon, "taking his food, grain by grain, to eat it at the glass, believing, doubtless, he is eating in company." They live so long that "the celebrated Gesner," as Buffon relates, "saw one white with age, feeble, almost unable to move, and whose nails and beak they cut every week, to enable him to eat." This patriarch was twenty-three years old. The siskin, a dusky little finch, rarely visits us, then very partially, and only in winter.*

The LINNET is a common and well-known songster; his blue bill would alone distinguish him from others of his tribe; has been sometimes thought different from the greater redpole: this, Mr. Montagu says, is a mistake. In the breeding season this bird betakes himself to furze and rough commons, and even migrates, as does the lesser redpole, another of his tribe, to mountainous and uncultivated tracts: indeed, there is no spot, however deserted and barren in winter, which, in summer, is not full of life. In winter the linnets assemble in large flocks, and feed on seeds: like the gold-

* The Siskin is to be seen in company, sometimes, with the lesser Redpole, amid the alder boughs, feeding on the seeds; they both hop about the small branches, and hang with the head downwards, in amusing attitudes.

finch, the linnet is a true friend to a slovenly farmer. We recollect, one December, observing two large flocks of these birds, of above 200 in each flight, frequenting, for several days, some turnip fields which were very full of charlock, or kedlock run to seed, and the ripe pods of which were just bursting to cast forth their grains. The linnets were indefatigably engaged in picking up the seeds of this troublesome weed: if each bird devoured only 100 seeds daily, then their united forces destroyed each day 40,000 charlock seeds; — so useful to the husbandman is this little helpmate! We must not conceal, however, that his name, in English and Latin, is derived from the Latin name of flax*, the seeds of which he greedily devours.

The remaining English finch, called the LESSER REDPOLE, taking his name from a fine red spot on the forehead of the cock bird, is an elegant species, lively in his movements and animated in his note. He is to be seen hanging on the boughs of the alder tree, pecking out the seeds: by his prim manner of holding his head, he makes the most of his size. Bewick gives his attitude with great exactness. "A hen of this species was so tenacious of her nest," says Mr. Pennant, "as to suffer us to take her off with

* *Linum*.

our hand; and we found, that after we had released her, she would not forsake it.”*

There are but two other tribes of sojourners remaining, each peculiar from other birds in habits and appearance:—the larks, containing some of our best songsters;—the titmice, without much pretence to song, but by unwearied activity, brilliant colours, and no little effrontery, attracting our notice. The English larks are six in number; one or two of them of rare or local occurrence. Larks are known by their straight long back claw, and by running instead of hopping; they live on the ground (though some of them occasionally perch on trees), and their dusky plumage is well suited to the colour of their habitual dwelling.



SKYLARK.

The largest of the tribe, well named the SKYLARK, is one of our most delightful songsters;

* Eyton.

common in almost every country; not driven away by civilisation, but rather more abounding in the best cultivated districts. Without any of the advantages of silence, seclusion, and awakened sympathy and expectation, which aid the melody of the nightingale, the skylark, known to every one, in the broad day, rising from the rough fallow, amid all the vulgar sounds of common life, lifts his mellow voice above the dusty world, and wins his way into the hearts of men, even from the coarse rustic, to the poet who hymns his praise.*

And every poet, from Milton to Burns, have celebrated our skylark. Nothing amid the cheerful sounds of nature is more exhilarating than his song: in the fresh morning, when every blade of grass and leafy stem is twinkling with liquid diamonds, the tuneful lavrock rises from the field, and "raising its note as it soars," seems to pour forth its little soul in the full tide of inspired song, "leaving all meaner things," and abandoning, as it were, this nether world, it mounts with triumphant wing into the skies, and is lost to our admiring gaze.

* "What must we think of that bird," says Wilson of the mocker, "who, in the glare of day, when a multitude of songsters are straining their throats in melody, overpowers all competition, and, by the superiority of his voice, expression, and action, not only attracts every ear, but frequently strikes dumb his mortified rivals!"

In this particular the lark is infinitely superior to all other songsters; they sing from a low bush, or brake, or tree, liable to be disturbed by every accident, often cowering and concealed from sight, as if ashamed of the strain that charms us. The lark, on the other hand, in the face of day, conspicuous to all the world, as though proud of his lay, makes the heavens resound with his music, and seems to exult in the united power of wing and song. Dwelling in the mid air, he reminds us of the proud lines of Campbell applied to England in another element : —

“ Her march is o’er the mountain wave —
Her home is on the deep.”

Milton, in a few verses, celebrates the early song of this bird : —

“ To hear the lark begin his flight,
And singing, startle the dull night,
From his watch tower in the skies,
Till the dappled dawn doth rise.”

In paying our humble tribute of praise to our favourite, we have forgotten to say any thing of his habits; these are, however, well known. Yet from their residence being on the ground, amid herbs and grass, we have not the same opportunity to watch the manners of larks as of many other small birds. Skylarks frequently

alight in roads to dust themselves, and will scarcely take flight when we approach them. They often crouch upon the ground, like the partridge race, till we almost touch them. In winter, assembled in large flocks, many of them visit the southern counties, in hard weather, and thousands are killed for the table. Leipzig is even more famous in Germany than Dunstable in England on this account, and a considerable excise is raised upon their sale. Whoever has watched a flock of these birds will have observed how, in advancing along a field in search of food, those that are in the rear of the flock flit over the heads of those before them, and thus each in his turn becomes avant courier to the rest. All running up and down, here and there, and searching every place: so that, on examining any spot, covered with snow, where they have been, we shall find scarcely a square foot unpaced. In frost, these poor birds sometimes come into the close vicinity of large towns. We remember some years ago, in unusually severe weather in March, vast numbers of larks suddenly appeared one morning in the fields and gardens near London, now occupied by Russell and Tavistock Squares. The world was up in arms against them, yet their ranks appeared not much dimi-

nished, till a thaw on the third day made them all disappear.

These birds cross the seas when pressed by extremity. In January, 1820, after a hard frost of a month, an immense body of larks came to Sidmouth, in Devonshire, apparently from the opposite coast; many were drowned, and hundreds killed, very poor and ill-fed, so that seven dozen sold for one shilling.

The WOODLARK is by no means a plentiful species, but is met with in most parts of the kingdom sparingly.* It sings delightfully on the wing, but rarely when sitting on the ground, though often when perched on a tree. The song is much more melodious than that of the skylark, but does not consist of so great a variety of notes; but then it sings almost throughout the year, except in June and July. It does not mount the air in the perpendicular manner, and continue hovering and singing in the same spot, like the skylark, but will some-

* A late observer says:—"Country bird-catchers take them by a very simple, but effectual, method; watching them to the ground, the wings of a hawk, or the brown owl, stretched out, are drawn against the current of the air, by a string, as a paper kite; and made to flutter and vibrate over the place where the woodlark has lodged; who remains crouching, and motionless as a stone, whilst a hand-net is put over it."—*Journal of a Naturalist.*

times soar to a great height, and keep flying in large irregular circles, singing the whole time with little intermission, and will thus continue in the air for an hour together. These birds rarely assemble in larger flocks than six or seven; most probably the family, which associate together till the returning spring.* The woodlark was a great favourite of the late Mr. Fox, who mentions it in his letters to Gilbert Wakefield. We have often seen the little family (described above) together; they crouch on one's approach, like the other lark, and then fly suddenly off, all at once, to some distant spot.†

The TITLARK, the next species, is common in most parts of the kingdom, and is partial to barren situations. It is found in open commons, among the heath, on the bleak hills in Wales and Scotland, where it often breeds; in winter it descends to lower grounds, meadows, rivulets, and ditches.

The PIPITLARK, rather larger than the last, frequents the same places; neither of them

* Montagu.

† These birds are by no means rare in the vicinity of Shrewsbury: in May, the cock-bird is continually attracting our notice by his song; rising in the air to a moderate height, and then descending with his wings open, in an elegant curve, to the top of some low tree or shrub, whence he sings at intervals.

have much of the crouching character of their race.

The ROCKLARK is very like the titlark in its habits, song, and manner of flying, but is only found near the sea, about salt marshes and rocky shores.

We have often seen the rocklark on the bold cliffs of Wales, where it is almost the only land bird willing to face the lashing of the wild surge. The Cornish chough, an elegant red-legged kind of crow, is perhaps its only companion on the higher cliffs, though much more scarce. Mr. Montagu enumerates also the fieldlark, a small species, migrating in winter.

There is still some obscurity respecting one or two species of larks and summer warblers; all the other British birds are to be found exactly described, and accurately distinguished. The difference in plumage between the male and female, and the imperfect marks on the immature feathers of young birds, may sometimes puzzle a youthful observer, but a little perseverance conquers the difficulty.

What bird is that (we think we hear a young enquirer ask) whose note in spring so exactly imitates the setting of a saw? — It is the great BLACK-HEADED TITMOUSE. We have often watched it emitting this grating sound, which ceases when it has a nest; and appears to fore-

tell rain. A nice observer of birds and quadrupeds will be able to predict changes in the weather better than the best barometer.

Our friend the sawyer is the largest of a very amusing tribe of birds, of seven in number: two of these, the crested titmouse (found only in the forests of Scotland), and the elegant bearded titmouse* (inhabiting inaccessible reedy tracts), will seldom come under our observation, but the other five are of no unfrequent occurrence, and two or three of them are always to be seen. None of them have any song, but a quick little chatter or twitter, which they continually repeat. Dwelling together in families, in continual movement, in every attitude, flitting unceasingly from bough to bough, and calling to each other, what was ill-naturedly said of the Irish ladies applies with great truth to the titmice: "there is no *repose* about them." Buffon, with his usual ability, gives a pleasing and accurate description of these birds, part of which we transcribe: — "They are lively, active, and courageous; they flit from tree to tree; they hop from branch to branch; they

* These birds are found amidst the reeds on the banks of the Thames. A friend informs us, that at Whittlesea Mere, in Huntingdonshire, they sometimes appear in great numbers one week, and the next none are to be seen. They chiefly feed on the seeds of marsh plants, but also eat insects.

hang upon the bark; they poise themselves against the walls; they hook themselves on the trunks of trees, and hang in all forms, often with the head downwards, in order to be able to examine every little crevice, and to search out caterpillars, insects, or their eggs. They live also on grain; but, instead of breaking it with their bill, like the linnets and goldfinches, almost all the titmice hold it fixed under their little claws, and pierce it with strokes of the beak. They pierce in the same way nuts and almonds. In general all the titmice, though rather fierce, love the company of their brethren, and keep in families. When they have been separated by some accident, they call mutually to each other, and soon rejoin in society." * They lay many eggs; most species making their nest in the hole of a tree, but one in a round ball appended to a branch, and of a size disproportioned to so small a bird: "so that it appears (says Buffon) as if they were able to count the number of their eggs before they were laid."

"Every species of titmouse (says Mr. White) winters with us †: they have what I call a

* Buffon. Mesange. The whole account will well repay the trouble of perusal.

† A correspondent of Mr. Loudon thinks several species partially migrate from the vicinity of Abbotsford, in Scotland; they certainly remain all the year in our midland counties. — See *Mag. Nat. Hist.* No. xviii.

kind of intermediate bill between the hard and the soft, between the Linnæan genera of *Fringilla* (finch) and *Motacilla* (warbler). One species alone spends its whole time in the woods and fields, never retreating for succour, in the severest seasons, to houses and neighbourhoods; and that is the delicate long-tailed titmouse, which is almost as minute as the golden-crested wren. But the blue titmouse, or nun (*Parus cæruleus*), the colemouse (*Parus ater*), the great black-headed titmouse (*Fringillago*), and the marsh titmouse (*Parus palustris*), all resort at times to buildings, and in hard weather particularly. The great titmouse, driven by stress of weather, much frequents houses; and, in deep snows, I have seen this bird, while it hung with its back downwards (to my no small delight and admiration), draw straws lengthwise from out the eaves of thatched houses, in order to pull out the flies that were concealed between them, and that in such numbers that they quite defaced the thatch, and gave it a ragged appearance.

“The blue titmouse, or nun, is a great frequenter of houses, and a general devourer. Besides insects, it is very fond of flesh; for it frequently picks bones in dunghills: it is a vast admirer of suet, and haunts butchers’ shops. When a boy, I have known twenty in

a morning caught with snap mouse-traps, baited with tallow or suet. * It will also pick holes in apples left on the ground ; and be well entertained with the seeds in the head of a sunflower. The blue, marsh, and great titmice will, in very severe weather, carry away barley and oats' straws from the sides of ricks."

The large BLACK-HEADED TITMOUSE, with a fine olive-green coat on his back, is very fond of fir trees. We had often heard in the winter a hammering noise, which appeared to be caused by this bird ; and, throwing a stone smartly at him, he dropped something, which proved to be a hazle nut, a little perforated at the smaller end, by repeated strokes of his bill. We often afterwards watched him at work, and found under his workshop many shells from which the nut had been extracted, and some split into halves. It is said, that if a nut be suspended at the end of a string, the titmouse will fix himself on this nut, and follow all its oscillations, without ceasing to hack it with his bill. †

* Buffon says, "if, caught in a trap, this titmouse should escape, he will return over and over to the same bait ; which seems extraordinary in so crafty a bird." The ingenious foreigner accounts for it as arising from his great courage ; "for, if he remembers he was caught, he also recollects he escaped."

† Buffon.

The little BLUE TITMOUSE, with a yellow breast, is very common, very pert, mischievous, and amusing; it has the provincial name of nun, we suppose, from some fancied resemblance of the white broad patches on its cheeks to the plain white head-dress of some religious order, — certainly from no similarity in manners to a female devotee: on the contrary, we have often thought its note sounded very like scolding. “It visits the farm-yard, and is partial to oats, which it plucks out; and, retiring to a neighbouring bush, fixes the grain between its claws, and hammers with the bill to break the husk.” *

This bird is considered the gardener’s enemy, from breaking off the buds of fruit trees, when in pursuit of insects or their eggs, which would probably be much more injurious. † It is said the eggs are six or seven in number; but Buffon assures us he has counted seventeen. “The female is tenacious of her nest,

* Montagu.

† A lover of birds remarks, that one item of a late overseer’s account in Gloucestershire was, “For seventeen dozen of tomtits’ heads;” and, after remarking on this harsh usage, says, “it peeps into the nail-holes of our walls, which, though closed by the cobweb, will not secrete the spider within; and draws out the chrysalis of the cabbage butterfly from the chinks in the barn.” — *Journal of a Naturalist.*

and will often suffer herself to be taken rather than quit it; and will frequently return again after being taken out. Upon such an occasion it menaces the invader in a singular manner, — hissing like a snake, erecting all its feathers, and uttering a noise like the spitting of a cat; and, if handled, bites severely.” *

No bird attacks the owl, in the day-time, with greater fierceness than our blue titmouse; buffeting its venerable adversary, erecting its feathers, screaming for aid, and in every way expressing its impotent rage. †

The MARSH TITMOUSE, known from the cole-mouse by wanting any white on the wings, is also called the little black-headed tomtit: his black head and grey plumage give him a sort of half-mourning look. This species is by no means uncommon, frequenting old willow trees, in the holes of which it makes its nest. Mr. Montagu says, “ We have seen it artfully excavating the decayed part of that tree, carrying the chips in its bill to some distance ‡; and

* Montagu.

† The titmice, and many other birds, may be easily observed, and their habits watched, by placing a little tray, or bird-feeder, in a convenient position, near the window of our sitting-room.

‡ Wilson says the American woodpecker takes the same precaution.

“ The carpenter bee carries away the bits of wood in

always working downwards, making the bottom, for the reception of the nest, larger than the entrance."

The COLE, or, properly, COAL TITMOUSE, is named in French *la petite charbonnière*, or the little collier, — a name well deserved from its sooty aspect, — and differs very little from the last. All the three blackheads have the sawyer's note. One other only of this tribe remains to be noticed, which, from its singular form and interesting habits, merits attention. Our young friends have, perhaps, remarked occasionally a little bird of very slender shape, passing through the air almost like a dart,—it is the LONG-TAILED TITMOUSE, named from his tail in all languages. Though the smallest of the tribe, and not so common as several of the preceding, he has always attracted notice by the elegance of his shape and the singularity of his nest: no bird has so many provincial names:—bottle tit,

the same way; the instinct of self-preservation thus producing the same effect on the bird and the insect."—

See *Insect Architecture*. An amusing writer, after describing a nest so artfully placed on the large branch of an elm, as nearly to resemble the knot of a tree, says "it had a feather fixed so as to overhang the entrance, and form a sort of valve pushed in or out as the birds left or entered the nest."—*Jesse's Gleanings in Nat. Hist.*

bottle tom, feather poke, long-tailed mag, long-tailed pie, long-tailed capon, mum ruffin, huck muck, ragged robin, poke pudding, jack in a bottle. This active little creature is in continual motion; and, when passing from the top of a high tree obliquely downwards to a hedge or shrub, it flits through the air like an unsteady arrow. Its curious oval nest is made on the fork of some branch; differing, in this respect, from all its tribe, who make their nests in holes. This bird's nest is well secured, made of liverwort and white moss, curiously and firmly wove together with wool, covered at the top, with only a small hole at the side, and lined with a prodigious quantity of feathers, the small webs of which are all laid inwards, with the quills or points stuck into the outside fabric. Often the outside is covered with tree and stone lichens, matted together with the silken shrouds of the aurelia of insects: from this thatch the rain trickles off without penetrating it; whilst, from its similarity in appearance to the bark of the branch in which it is most commonly placed, it is not easily to be discovered. Sometimes there are two entrances, that the inmate may avoid the inconvenience of turning with his long tail. It lays from twelve to sixteen eggs, about the size of a pea — less than those of any

British bird, except the golden-crested wren.* We have often watched a family of these little fellows, always bustling and encouraging each other by their cries, they appear the happiest of the feathered tribe;—With apparently few enemies, not dependent on the neighbourhood of men; always occupied, yet dwelling in cheerful society; too small to be coveted for food, yet gay enough to attract notice; possessing the snuggest nest in the world, without being forced to leave annually their native place. *

“In the month of July,” says Mr. Montagu †, “we observed a brood of these birds, consisting of about twelve, constantly frequent a small plantation to roost, for a long time after they quitted their nest. Just as it became dusk in the evening, they were apparently extremely restless; but, by a singular note uttered by one, and as instantaneously repeated by the whole, they assembled in a moment, and huddled so close together on a branch as to appear like a ball of down.”

This assemblage, in close contact during the night, is probably common to many of the smaller birds for a long time after they leave their nest; for we have observed the same noc-

* See *Architecture of Birds*, p. 330.

† Supplement to *Ornith. Dict.*

turnal attachment in young birds brought up in confinement.

Having concluded our humble remarks on those birds to which our attention was confined, we will venture to introduce to our young readers a quotation from an eloquent traveller in a savage country: — “He whose eye can distinguish the various beauties of uncultivated nature, and whose ear is not shut to the wild sounds in the woods, will be delighted in passing up the river Demerara: every now and then the maam, or tinamou, sends forth one long and plaintive whistle from the depth of the forest, and then stops; whilst the yelping of the toucan, and the shrill voice of the bird called pi-pi-yo, is heard during the interval. The campanero never fails to attract the attention of the passenger: at a distance of nearly three miles you may hear this snow-white bird tolling, every four or five minutes, like the distant convent bell. At sundown the vampires, bats, and goatsuckers dart from their lonely retreat, and skim along the trees on the river’s bank. The different kinds of frogs almost stun the ear with their hoarse and hollow-sounding croaking; while the owls and goatsuckers lament all night long.” *

* Waterton’s Wanderings in Guiana, p. 14.

Though, undoubtedly, we have no sounds so interesting to a naturalist as those heard in a tropical forest; yet one, who had not tried the experiment, would scarcely conceive the many different voices of nature, which strike an attentive ear in our own country, and almost at our own doors ! Let any of our young friends enter an undisturbed wood or plantation about half an hour before sunset, late in the autumn, and remain awhile concealed and silent. They will find, instead of solitude, they were never less alone ! A hundred varied sounds of animated beings proclaim that they live and move ! At that time the tribes of night and day animals are both in motion, — the one about retiring to their rest, the other coming forth to seek their food !

The blackbird reiterates his clear “clink, clink,” as we approach his domain ; the magpie catches up the note of alarm, and repeats it to his fellows ; the jay’s dissonant scream is heard ; and the sluggish crow calls to his old mate that danger is abroad ! We remain perfectly still, and the disturbance gradually subsides. The rabbit hops forth, and, rising on his hind legs, looks round to see all is safe. A slight noise in the trees near us attracts our attention. The squirrels watch us with significant gesture, whisking their bushy tails. The weak note of

the golden-crested wren calls our eye to the fir above us, where this minute creature is busy seeking his food: the titmice chatter Good even to each other. What has alarmed all the small birds? That sparrowhawk, returning home, almost glided in among them! We hear a scream somewhat like that of an infant in distress: it is a leveret which the prowling stoat has just seized upon! The partridges call in the adjoining field; the pheasant cocks crow as they fly up to roost: the hen birds we may distinguish by their singular whistle. One, two, three, we may count every bird in the coppice. A sound passes by us like a rushing wind; it is the hurried flight of the redwings, who descend in numbers to their rest: the magpies drop in in small parties, vigilant to the last! We are startled by the fluttering noise of the numerous wood-pigeons, which arrive for a quarter of an hour almost without intermission. The rooks, passing high over us, "thick urge their weary flight, and seek the shelter of the grove." The rustle of more rapid wings causes us to look up, and we see the wild ducks making their repeated circles; in each of which they descend nearer their point, till at length they drop into the neighbouring stream. And, as the mist of night comes on, the fox crosses near us, the hedgehog creeps forth, and the grey owl "down the lone vale sails away."

We have forgotten to speak of two little birds of singular habits and great beauty, both dwelling about rivers and brooks: these are the KING-FISHER and the WATER OUSEL. The first is not uncommon. His brilliant hues, and his rapid and determined flight, distinguish him from all other birds: he glides by us with the rapidity of a meteor, leaving us struck with admiration of his beauty: his cry is shrill and harsh. The little plump, dark, active dipper is only found near rocky streams, and generally on mountainous districts. His form is dapper and short: he frequents the stones near waterfalls, walks into the water, plunges beneath it, and can walk on the bottom in pursuit of his prey: he has a little shrill note, and flies straight near the surface of the water. He has a white spot on his breast, which he does not care to display; for his attitude is downward bent, like one looking into the water for all his wants.*

* A small pocket telescope, adapted to short distances within 100 hundred yards, will be very useful to an observer of birds. By means of little trap nets, properly baited, almost all our smaller birds may be taken without much difficulty — they can then be put in a cage for a short time, in order that we may become acquainted with their plumage and forms, and afterwards be set at liberty. The top of the cage should be lined with cloth or some soft material.

CHAP. IV.

OWLS. — HAWKS.

HAVING finished our outline of the smaller birds found round our homes, we will make a few miscellaneous observations on one or two other tribes and groups of birds adding much to the interest of the scenes around us.

There are two sets or groups of birds more especially, each of which add a great charm to the spots in which they are found; and are marked by strong characteristic traits.

The first are the birds of prey; and the second, marine birds, or those found about the sea margin. We shall only attempt to give a general outline of these birds, with a few remarks, to show the powerful effect their presence produces in animating the landscape, and how worthy of regard they are to the admirers of nature!

The birds of prey in England are of two families, — the owls, and the hawks, or falcon tribe.

Of the former we will say very little: there are five or six different species, some migratory,

but others remaining during the whole year with us. A very beautiful species, the snowy owl, has lately been added to the number, being discovered in the northern isles of Scotland, whence it migrates from Norway and Iceland. Its warm vest of virgin white, elegantly marked with black spots, gives it a most attractive plumage.*

The two most common owls — the WHITE or SCREECH OWL, and the WOOD or BROWN OWL — merit our attention. The plumage of the former, consisting of elegant markings of buff on a white ground, is very beautiful. It inhabits some old building, dark deserted dwelling, or undisturbed barn-loft, during the day; and in the evening glides forth in light and noiseless flight around our homesteads and houses. In the dusk, its white and flickering form relieves the gloom, and often startles the timid maiden. Its cry — a scream of great harshness and a singular hiss not easily forgotten — has always been considered of melancholy import.

We might quote from numberless authors, ancient and modern, passages to show that this bird has been deemed, in all times, and almost all countries, the messenger of evil.

At the Cape of Good Hope, where this bird

* "Its voice, however, is so dismal, that it adds horror even to the regions of Greenland." — *Pennant*.

is said to be found, it is called by the colonists "dood vogel," or "bird of death."

This species extends to the New Continent, and is found in Asia. Pennant says, "The Mongols pay it almost divine honours; attributing to this species the preservation of the founder of their empire, Gïnghis Khan. That prince, with his small army, happened to be put to flight by his enemies, and forced to conceal himself in a small coppice: an owl settled on the bush in which he was hid, and induced his pursuers not to search there, as they thought it impossible any man could be concealed in a place where that bird would perch." *

It has various provincial names, as gillihowter, howlet, madge howlet. †

This owl becomes exceedingly tame when taken young. "We bred up," says Mr. Mon-

* Pennant, Arctic Zoology. This owl must have been of the same race with the celebrated bird, whose language was translated to the Sultan Mahmoud; and acted on the principle of "one good turn deserves another." If conquerors furnish ruined villages for owls; — owls should protect the sacred person of conquerors!

† "It is worthy of remark," says Wilson, "that in all owls that fly by night the exterior edges and sides of the wing-quills are slightly recurved, and end in fine hairs, or points; by means of which the bird is enabled to pass through the air with the greatest silence: a provision necessary for enabling it the better to surprise its prey."

tagu, "one with a sparrow-hawk and a ring dove who were confined together and lived in great harmony; but the latter was the most quarrelsome, and was master of the triumvirate.

— This ill-omened bird is very apt to disturb, by its boding cry, the chambers of the sick. Near the windows of the melancholy apartment where the dying recline, at intervals it utters its dissonant sound of sorrow, increasing the dismay of the afflicted relatives.*

Mr. Waterton, whose interesting researches into the natural history of Guiana are well known, has written an ingenious letter in favour of the BARN OWL. After quoting many authors who have decried unjustly this bird, he produces two stanzas in its favour from an old song: —

“ Once I was a monarch’s daughter,
And sat on a lady’s knee;
But am now a nightly rover,
Banish’d to the ivy tree.

* “It is a well known fact,” says an amusing writer (smiling a little in his sleeve), “that if any person were ill in the neighbourhood it would be for ever looking in at the window, and holding a conversation outside with somebody, we *did not know who*.” Though persecuted elsewhere, this gentleman has built it a house on his gateway, and says, “I have now four broods, and hope to have nine next year.”

“ Crying hoo hoo, hoo hoo, hoo hoo,
Hoo hoo hoo, my feet are cold!
Pity me, for here you see me
Persecuted, poor, and old.” *

An attentive observer gives an amusing account of the habits of a pair of these owls:—
“About an hour before sunset (for then the mice begin to run), they sally forth in quest of prey, and hunt all round the hedges of meadows and small enclosures for them; which seem to be their only food. In this irregular country we can stand on an eminence and see them beat the fields over like a setting dog, and often drop down in the grass or corn. I have minutely watched these birds, with my watch, for an hour together; and have found that they return to their nest, the one or the other of them, about once in five minutes. White owls seem not (but in this I am not positive) to hoot at all: “all that clamorous hooting appears to me to come from the wood kinds. The white owl does, indeed, snore and hiss in a tremendous manner. I have known a whole village up in arms on such an occasion, imagining the churchyard to be full of goblins and spectres.” †

* Loudon's Mag. of Nat. Hist. No. xxiii. We think the cry is, however, that of the brown, not the white or barn, owl.

† White's Selborne, vol. i. p. 261. The owl, if undisturbed, frequents the same place a long time. One had

The only other species of owl we will notice is the common WOOD OWL. It is destructive in its habits to game and young poultry, but elegant in its flight.

In the day it keeps close in some hollow tree, or thickly matted ivy-bush; and in the evening sails forth along the hedge sides, and along the skirts of woods, beating the ground with great regularity, and often dropping suddenly to pick up some ill-fated mouse who had crept out in supposed security. The fur and feathers of their prey (a portion of which is swallowed by all rapacious birds) is ejected in pellets; and Mr. White mentions, that an old hollow tree, the habitation of successive generations of owls, being taken down, some bushels of these pellets were found in it.*

We do not see why the owl, if domesticated, might not be a valuable assistant to the husbandman. If there was one or two belonging to every rick-yard and barn, they would well

been used to inhabit a hole in the wall of a house: on repairing the house, this hole was stopped up; but the owl was, in consequence, so clamorous, that the inhabitants had no peace till the hole was again opened.—*Jesse's Gleanings.*

* This is the bird whose melancholy, but, in our opinion, pleasing and musical call we often hear, — hoo; hoo — oo—oo—oo.

repay a little trouble; and would be at work when others sleep. The habit of taming birds or other animals is of no little use in forming kind and patient dispositions in the young! Those who have seen the storks in Holland building on the cottage roofs, and stalking about the road sides and dykes, will not think this a hopeless attempt.

It is by continual and often wanton persecution that all the lower animals are driven from us: and their dread might soon be overcome by kind treatment.

Those who reside in the country might thus derive a constant source of innocent amusement. Hawks formerly were taught to assist in the chase. The otter and cormorant have been tamed to fish for their masters, and still do so in India.* We have seen numbers of wild ducks flying round a person they were used to, and quacking their joy at his approach with food.† Pheasants, in several preserves, come to the keeper's whistle to be fed. Sparrows,

* Heber's Journal in India.

† It was curious to see an old keeper, accustomed to feed the wild ducks at a seat in Staffordshire, holding a sort of conversation with the flights as they passed him towards home. "Those are my ducks, your honour!" says old Joseph: "hic! hic! hic!" — "Quack! quack!" reply the ducks. "We are your ducks, Joseph!"

and other small birds, will soon approach those who feed them regularly.

The other division of rapacious birds, viz. the falcon tribe, is familiarly divided into four families, consisting of eagles, kites, buzzards, and hawks: they are found in almost every part of the world, from the frigid to the torrid zone. We shall only advert to a few of those most frequently found in England, and say little of the scarcer species.

Some of the EAGLES are still found in Scotland, and occasionally visit our mountainous districts on the sea-shores. *

The rapacious birds, however, commonly found with us do not consist of more than eight species, four of a larger and four of a smaller size; and almost all distinguished from each other by some characteristic, which may be recognised by even a careless observer.

The largest and, perhaps, most common is the BUZZARD, a large brown hawk with a square

* An admirable description of the habits of the American eagles, by Wilson and Audubon, will be found in the "American Ornithology," lately published in a cheap form. The account of the contests between the white-headed eagle and the fish hawk, and the eagle's chase of the swan, on the Mississippi, can hardly be surpassed. Throughout the volumes there are many other excellent descriptions, replete with interest to any one fond of natural history.

tail. It is of an indolent nature, and will sit for hours on a tree or eminence: there is generally



BUZZARD.

a pair or two about most large woods. In the breeding season it soars to a great height, ascending spirally; and its cry or call is very loud and piercing, sounding like the word pe-e-hawk, drawled out shrilly. This bird is often taken young, and, being preserved, is useful in a garden to drive away birds.

The MOOR BUZZARD, or WHITE-HEADED HARPY, is a handsome bird of rust-coloured plumage, distinguished by white or yellow feathers on the crown of the head. His haunts are amid fens and marshes, preying on rabbits, waterfowl, frogs, and fish: his flight is near the ground and undulating; and his singular appearance contrasts well with the bleak and

uncultivated fens and marshy commons where he is found.



MOOR BUZZARD.

The FORK-TAILED KITE, or GLEAD, easily known by his forked tail, is not uncommon, and of powerful wing. It soars very high, and moves at a vast height, round and round, without any apparent motion of the wings: hence its name of glead or glide.

The poet Cowper describes this elegant motion in his well-known lines:—

“ But cawing rooks, and kites that swim sublime
In still repeated circles, screaming loud,

The jay, the pie, and ev'n the boding owl,
That hails the rising moon, have charms for me."



KITE.

One other of the larger hawks is not uncommon with us, differing in habits and appearance from the three preceding. It beats hedges and fields, flying near the ground with an easy, leisurely flight, somewhat like the buoyant, fitful course of the sea-gull; first one wing, and then the other, being most elevated. The cock and hen birds differ so much in plumage as to be long taken for different species, till Mr. Montagu determined the fact by rearing the young birds. The HEN HARRIER, or cock bird, is a beautiful blue hawk, almost the colour of a dove-house pigeon; whilst the hen,

called the ringtail, is a large, long-winged, brown hawk, larger than the male (as is the case in all



HEN HARRIER.

the hawk tribe), with a white bar across the tail.

These birds make their nest in furze: they are very destructive to game. In shooting, the writer has seen the hen harrier dart at a partridge which his dogs put up, and carry it off: by following the marauder some distance he got the partridge, which was quite dead, with a very slight mark on the head. Another day he shot the ringtail; and, on examining the spot where the hawk got up, found a partridge half devoured: this had been killed, as appeared by the feathers, at a little distance, but carried to the edge of a splash of water, where

the plunderer had an opportunity of washing his beak and claws between every mouthful, and eating his quarry like a gentleman! — or rather, in this case, a lady! Mr. White says, this bird is sometimes so bold that it will hover round the sportsmen beating a field, and pursue pheasants as they are started, even immediately after the gun has been fired.

The four smaller hawks, which are not uncommon, are the hobby, the sparrow-hawk, the kestrel, and the merlin.

The HOBBY, about the size of the sparrow hawk (12 inches in length), is not unlike it in plumage, having a black head, but the stripes in the breast are faint and lengthways, instead of across. It is said to migrate and leave us in October, but we have shot it in January.

The SPARROW-HAWK is a bold and active plunderer; forth from his forest home he goes at early morn, and returns, late in the evening, the same way. Larks and small birds are his chief prey. The writer has often allured him to his destruction, by walking up the larks for him in the open fields of the Isle of Thanet, when the sparrow-hawk, descending to pursue them, came within shot. If not the first stoop, yet he would wait, at a little distance, till the lark was again disturbed, when he again rapidly approached. These birds are very destructive.

to young chickens: one of these hawks, having his talons cut and a cork on his bill, was thrown down among the brood hens, who buffeted and beat him to death. "Nothing," says Mr. White, "could exceed the indignation of the enraged matrons."

The KESTREL (well named the Wind Hover) is easily known by its stationary place whilst hovering in the air over its prey; hence it sometimes drops down on its quarry, or, at others, proceeds, having lost its opportunity: the cock and hen bird differ much in plumage. The hen (whose back is of rust colour crossed with black bars) is the most beautiful of British hawks. It is fond of the vicinity of old ruins; and, in warm weather, we hear its cry, pli, pli, pli, sharply repeated. It hunts in pairs.

The MERLIN is the least of this rapacious tribe, hardly larger than a thrush, yet fierce and active. The plates of all these are given with admirable accuracy in Bewick's *British Birds*, — a manual for those fond of this subject. The Hobby leaves us usually in autumn, when the merlin first appears in the southern parts of our island. Many of these migrations are continually taking place around us, unheeded or unknown.

The hawk tribe were formerly greatly valued for their use in falconry. They were trained to

the chase of other birds, and to return to the whistle of their keeper. This sport was confined to the noble and the great, who endeavoured to protect these rapacious birds by severe laws, much resembling in spirit the cruel enactments to preserve forests and chases for the pastime of some of our Norman kings.

CHAP. V.

WATER BIRDS.

WE now venture to turn our view to a society (if we may use that term) of birds, quite different from those last spoken of: we will take a cursory glance at the birds of the sea, and the sea borders. These beautiful beings are exceedingly numerous; and, to an admirer of nature dwelling near the ocean, would afford endless subject of remark and amusement. Without descending to particulars, we may observe that these birds may be placed in four general divisions; — the duck tribe, the divers, the gull family, and the waders. Some or other of these are to be found on all our shores, and give a life and animation to marine scenes, which no one can describe.

The DUCK tribe, which are very numerous, visit us (except a small number of the common wild duck) in the autumn and leave us in the spring. The wild swan, four kinds of wild

geese*, and no less than twenty smaller species, belong to this tribe. Many are calculated to fly at the rate of above forty miles per hour. In long columns they take their airy way on the approach of winter, and leaving the wild regions of the bleak north, where, amid swamps and forest lakes they had reared their young, they pour themselves around our shores and estuaries. We shall not particularise their habits, but only observe that their bold flight in long lines, almost approaching to regular order, has a very picturesque effect, and the cry of some of the wild geese on their way has in it an echoing clang well adapted to a gathering note.† An ancient author tells us, with great gravity, that the wild geese passing by Mount Taurus, and aware of their propensity to gabble, (which betrayed them to their enemies the eagles, found in that vicinity,) used to carry each a pebble in their bills, till they were past this dangerous

* The Barnacle Goose was formerly seen in such numbers, that it was believed to spring from a sort of shell attached to the sea weeds on some rocks. Old authors give an amusing account of this matter. — See *Gerard's Herbal*.

† The van is generally led by an old gander, who every now and then pipes his well-known *honk*, as if to ask how they came on; and the honk of "all's well" is generally returned by some of the party.

spot. Some of us might perhaps borrow a useful hint from this fable of old times.

Being generally very good to eat, thousands of the duck tribe are annually taken in decoys, in Lincolnshire and elsewhere, and sent to London; and many more are shot upon our shores. Wild fowl frequent, in great numbers, the low flat shores in Hampshire, opposite the Isle of Wight; and we cannot resist inserting an account of the peril of a wild fowl shooter on that coast: —

“ Mounted on his mud pattens, he was traversing one of these mudland plains in quest of ducks; and, being only intent on his game, he suddenly found the waters, which had been brought forward with uncommon rapidity by some peculiar circumstance of tide, had made an alarming progress around him. To whatever part he ran, he found himself completely invested by the tide: a thought struck him, as the only hope of safety; he retired to that part which was yet uncovered with water, and, sticking the barrel of his gun, (which, for the purpose of shooting wild fowl, was very long,) deep into the mud, he resolved to hold fast by it as a support against the waves, and to wait the ebbing of the tide. A common tide, he had reason to believe, would not in that place have reached

above his middle, but this was a spring tide, and brought forward by a strong westerly wind. The water had now reached him; it covered the ground on which he stood; it rippled over his feet; it gained his knees, his waist. Button after button was swallowed up, till, at length, it advanced over his very shoulders. With a palpitating heart he gave himself up for lost. Still, however, he held fast by his anchor: his eye was eagerly bent in search of some boat which might take its course that way; but none appeared. A solitary head sometimes covered by a wave, was no object to be descried from shore at the distance of half a league. Whilst he was making up his mind to the terrors of certain destruction, his attention was called to a new object! He thought he saw the uppermost button of his coat begin to appear. No mariner could behold a cape at sea with greater transport, than he did the uppermost button of his coat! But the fluctuation of the water was such, and the turn of the tide so slow, that it was yet some time before he durst venture to assure himself, that the button was fairly above the level of the flood. At length, however, a second button appearing at intervals, his sensations may rather be conceived than described; and his joy gave him spirits and reso-

lution to support his uneasy situation four or five hours longer, till the waters had fully retired !” *

The next great family, the DIVERS, consist of several species, for the most part local and migratory ; as the puffins, auks, and guillemots : they come to rear their young upon our cliffs in particular spots ; and leave us early in autumn. The noise of their various cries cannot be conceived by one who has not witnessed their myriads in the breeding season.

Among these may be ranked that dark plunderer, the CORMORANT, who remains with us all



CORMORANT.

the year. His wild and suspicious look, sombre plumage, and bold determined flight, mark

* Gilpin's Forest Scenery.

him from other birds; his upper bill is hooked over the other, so as to hold firmly his slippery prey; and he makes his nest either on the ledges of rocks or in trees; in the latter he often perches. These birds visit large waters in the inland counties, and follow up the course of our larger rivers; they sometimes take a liking to a particular spot, and appear to become attached to it for some time.

In the Severn, a few miles above Shrewsbury, there is an island with some tall trees; about twenty years ago, the persons who lived near perceived that these trees were resorted to by two or three cormorants; they remained about the spot for several months, till towards the breeding season. The cormorants returned the following autumn, bringing with them three or four more (perhaps their progeny), and they gradually increased to the number of sixteen or eighteen, which might be seen about their favourite haunt, taking their airy excursions along the course of the river, and not unfrequently passing near the village and church; at which the ancient rustics of both sexes shook their heads, and said "something would happen!" Foragers or stragglers from this colony visited the waters round in various directions. This dwelling of wild sea plunderers, sixty miles from the ocean, in the midst of an inclosed and

highly cultivated country, continued many years, and a few still are occasionally seen there.

The cormorant, or corvorant, takes its name from two Latin words, signifying "the devouring crow," from his supposed rapacity; and Milton, having described Satan as taking this form, his character has been unfairly decried. That accurate observer of Nature, the late Mr. Montagu, has vindicated the docility and sociable disposition of this bird, in an amusing account of one taken in a wild state, and which soon became domesticated: — "It is," says this able naturalist, "extremely docile, of a grateful disposition, without the smallest tincture of a savage and vindictive spirit; and by no means possessing the bad qualities a celebrated writer would induce us to believe, by making it personify Satan. In less than a week after its capture it was perfectly familiarised, and made one in the family circle round the fire, suffering the caresses of the children. Being removed to an aquatic menagerie, it lived in perfect harmony with a whistling swan, a barnacle goose, various sorts of ducks, and other occasional birds. If it gets out, it never attempts to ramble, but, walking direct to the house, enters the first open door, without deference to any one, regardless even of a dog, and in fact is troublesomely tame."

The next tribe of marine birds, to which we would direct the attention of an observer, is the GULL family; under which name we include



GULL.

the sea swallows, as partaking of the same general habits. These tenants of the ocean borders are in almost constant motion; their plumage of a virgin white, or light grey, contrasts beautifully with the green waves around them.

In storms they wanton, as it were, on the wind, dipping down amid the yeasty billows, and again rising upon their buoyant wings.*

* "The zealous enquirer will find himself amply compensated for all his toil, by observing these birds coursing along the rivers and coast, enlivening the prospect by their airy movements, now skimming closely over the watery element, watching the motions of the surges, and now rising into the higher regions, sporting with the winds." — *Wilson.*

All painters of marine views have given life to their pictures by the introduction of these birds, whose light and wheeling course, and silvery forms, contrast strongly with the straight determined flight of the dark-plumed cormorants.

The large BLACK-BACKED GULL is nearly the size of a goose, and is of a mottled grey tint in its immature plumage: it has a singularly deep inward note, not easily mistaken. In returning home late in the evening, across some wide sands on the coast of Kent, we first heard this note in perfection; the storm began to threaten and the surges to chafe, whilst darkness was fast surrounding us on a shore dangerous from its quicksands: the tide advanced rapidly; and whilst somewhat embarrassed whether to advance or retreat, the full guttural melancholy note of this bird (deeper than the raucous bod-ing cry of the raven) sounded in sad cadence between the gusts.

It once happened to us to hear the note of another bird, under somewhat similar circumstances not easily forgotten. The author, then at Trinity College, Cambridge, was out on a snipe shooting expedition, with two young friends; and was returning, towards the close of day, in one of the fen boats, across Whittle-sea Mere in Huntingdonshire: much fatigued, and very wet, the party were anxious to get

enumerate every one of this numerous tribe, or particularise their distinctions ; but there is not one unworthy our notice — from the stately heron, stalking solemnly near the sedgy pool, to the little stint, no bigger than a lark, running briskly from the returning wave. We do not know why those dwelling habitually near the bleak spots where these birds are found, might not derive as much amusement from observing their habits as we have done. It is only our intention to advert to a few of the most common, hoping to enlist attention to the rest. The plovers, sandpipers, snipes, sea larks, and all such as “earn their daily food” rather on the shore, perambulating here and there, than on the wing or in the waters, belong to those we have called waders : many of them rear their young elsewhere, and visit our coasts in the autumn, remaining till the spring, either congregated together in large numbers, or in family parties of five or six ; they course along the margins of our salt marshes and flat estuaries, enlivening, by their various cries, the wild spots which they frequent. As the tide ebbs, and the waves retreat from the sand banks or mud shores, each little rise of ground, as it emerges from the sea, is taken possession of by these indefatigable searchers, hastening to seek what the deep has left them : they call to each other

as if in emulation; and often shifting their place, and flitting across the waters, animate the scene.

One of the largest of this tribe commonly seen on our shores is the CURLEW; his mottled greyish plumage and long bill bent downwards easily mark him. These birds congregate together in the winter in large flocks, and in their flight often follow each other almost in a line like wild ducks. If seen near, stalking across the salt marsh, they have a stately appearance, and their cry or call is singularly wild and sonorous, echoing through the darkness as they take their way along the shores, and thus avoid losing each other. Many of them breed on the mountains in the interior of the northern parts of Britain; and we have seen the family (six in number), towards the end of summer, crossing the country, to join the various tribes who frequent our shores in autumn.

Though remarkably shy in his wild state, the curlew soon becomes docile. "One that was shot in the wing," says Mr. Montagu*, "was tempted to eat bread and milk, by putting worms into the mess. It was curious to observe how cautiously he avoided the mixture at first, carrying every worm to the pond, and well

* Ornithological Dictionary.

washing it previous to swallowing. He soon became used to the bread and milk, and got plump; and, in a month, became excessively tame, would follow a person for a bit of bread or a small fish. He became almost omnivorous, — fish, water lizards, insects of every kind, and, in defect of other food, barley with the ducks. With his long bill he defended himself with courage, contending for food with the shieldrakes, and even with the common gull, and keeping his antagonist at a distance by the length of this weapon."

Another beautiful bird, not uncommon on our flat shores, and, at low tide, seen about the rocks seeking limpets and other shell-fish, is the SEA PIE or Oyster Catcher. They rear their young on our sandy shores in summer, and congregate on the sea banks and margins in the winter; easily known by their black and white livery, their red legs and bill, and their bleating cry. The bill, about four inches long, is curiously contrived for opening shell-fish, the bird's principal food. Their flight is even and elegant, and their cries, across the waters, piercing, and heard afar off.

In the high spring tide, with a strong breeze blowing to shore, we have often been witness to an animated scene in which the sea pies

performed a part.* Concealed behind a sea bank, projecting into a wide estuary and bay, surrounded with flat shores and extended sandbanks, we have watched the effect of the advancing tide, as it drove the various families of waders from their usual haunts; at first changing their place and crowding together on some spot still elevated above the waters, then traversing the shores in small parties or numerous bodies, with eager flight and clamorous cries, in search of a resting place; till at length, like the travelled dove, they find no spot whereon to alight.

For a short time, till the tide ebbs, the whole bay seems alive with the numerous aërial wanderers: long lines of curlews are seen across the waves, and their sonorous cry echoes along the shores; the sea pies, with hurried flight, keep passing to and fro, calling to each other. The various tribes of plovers course across the bay, whistling in melancholy cadence, and whole flights of that diminutive sand snipe (the purre, or hawk's bird), sweep along the sea border, taking their way in semicircles over the sea; the whole

* "A flock will often rise, descend, and wheel in air with remarkable regularity, as if drilled to the business; the glittering white of their wings being, at such times, very conspicuous."

body turning (as at a signal) their breasts or backs towards the observer, and appearing a black or white nation, as the sun shines upon one or the other.

Almost all the waders, though they do not take the water from choice, can swim, if forced to do so, and row themselves along with a little undulating motion. A circumstance not easily forgotten has taught the writer that they can swim well, and dive also.

Several years ago, in shooting on the bleak open coast between Sandwich and Deal, a sea pie fell in the sea with his wing broken; he appeared to float rather than swim; having no dog, and being a good swimmer, the author determined to bring him out, and taking off his clothes, followed the bird, who then kept out to sea: after proceeding a considerable distance from shore, it was found that the sea pie swam nearly as fast as his pursuer; feeling somewhat exhausted, the writer turned to go back, when he discovered, to his great alarm, that the current set very strongly against him, and that, in several strokes, he scarcely gained an inch towards the beach! There was no house, boat, or human being within sight, or, indeed, within several miles. In this perilous situation the swimmer manned himself against despair, and as much as possible against agitation, knowing

his only chance of life was in calm and strenuous exertion. When his arms were tired he turned on his back, and crossed them on his breast for rest; and looked with longing eyes across the bay to the distant cliffs of Ramsgate, (where his family then were,) as towards those whom he would never see again. He felt himself grow gradually weaker, when a thought fortunately struck him, to try across the current rather than against it; and by this means he at length gained the side, quite exhausted, several hundred yards below where his clothes lay. The author has therefore good reason to know the waders can swim.*

The bird soon after came towards shore, and was overtaken in shallow water, when he immediately dived and re-appeared eight or ten yards off, but was soon caught. He appeared to move under water, like the moor hen or sand-piper, beating himself forward with his wings and legs, so that many of the waders can dive as well as swim.

There are various others of these birds found on our shores in autumn and winter, affording amusement to an attentive observer.

* This species is found in the United States: and Wilson nearly lost his life in a like adventure, related in his interesting work.

LONDON:
Printed by A. & R. Spottiswoode,
New-Street-Square.





